and the Sumerian language for a wide variety of documents, administrative, religious and literary. And at Ebla, the local West-Semitic language was also written in that script. Later, during the 2nd millennium, Syrian states normally used the Akkadian language and cuneiform script. The seaport of Ugarit also wrote its own local West-Semitic language in a cuneiform alphabet. Like the Ebla dialect, Ugaritic is quite closely related to Hebrew, Canaanite and Phoenician. Where Egyptian influence was particularly strong – as at Byblos – the local rulers sometimes set up inscriptions in Egyptian hieroglyphs and language.

But in south Syria and Palestine (Canaan), a still more important script came into use from the mid 2nd millennium BC onwards: the alphabet. This was a set of 26 or 30 simple signs to stand each for a single consonantal sound (perhaps originally, plus any vowel). With this limited set of simple signs to spell any word by its consonantal framework, literacy steadily became possible for a far greater number of people. From the 'Proto-Sinaitic' inscriptions and other fragments (c.1500 BC and perhaps even earlier) down through early Canaanite (to 1200/1100 BC), it is possible to chart the history and progress of the alphabet in Phoenicia (from where it reached the Greeks), in Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Transjordanian dialects of Moab, Edom and Ammon, contemporary with the Hebrew kingdoms, exile and return, to Graeco-Roman times. In this group of West-Semitic languages and dialects, the alphabetic inscriptions vary greatly in content. We have royal inscriptions (Byblos, Moab, Ammon; Cilicia), administrative documents and private letters (ostraca, Hebrew and Aramaic), some papyri (mainly Aramaic), and innumerable personal stamp-seals bearing the names of their owners (practically all dialects), use of which presupposes that many people could read enough to distinguish between them. There are inscribed arrow-heads, notations of person, place, or capacity on jar-handles – the list of everyday uses is quite varied. Thus, certainly from c.1100 BC (and probably rather earlier), writing in Canaan, then in Israel, Phoenicia and round about was clearly part of everyday life and not restricted solely to a special scribal elite.[6]

Thus, throughout the ancient biblical world, not one but several systems of writing were in use, often at the same time, and sometimes even in one place (as at Ugarit, or with the Hittites). Whenever writing occurs, we find it used for documents and literature of every conceivable kind. With the advent of the West-Semitic alphabet, the use of writing became possible for many more people during biblical times.

2

The Most Ancient World

The antiquity of civilisation on our planet has always been a source of fascination to ancients and moderns alike. One thinks of the little girl visiting a major museum with her parents, pausing (like most children) before the inevitable Egyptian mummy, and asking, 'Is he older than Granny?' Or, away back in antiquity itself, the reader of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh is invited to admire the ancient walls of the hero's city of Uruk: 'the wall of girdled Uruk he built ..., climb upon the wall of Uruk, walk about on it, inspect the foundation-terrace, examine the brickwork – see, is it not of burnt brick, and did not the ancient Seven Sages lay its foundations?'

TIME-PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

Primeval antiquity going back into 'the night of time' is one of the themes that formed part of the cultural heritage treasured in the ancient Near East both inside and outside the Old Testament. In the opening chapters of Genesis (1–11), we see the Old Testament's principal vista of early antiquity, drawn in broad outline, before the focus changes sharply to centre upon Abraham and his family. In contrast to 1–11, the narratives from Genesis 12 onwards deal in varying detail with individuals, a family and a clan, and no longer with events of cosmic dimension or in terms of long series of generations. The picture that Genesis 1–11 presents to us has three episodes – creation, flood, origins of Abraham – linked

by the thread of two long genealogies (Genesis 5 and 11). As we shall see later, other peoples of the biblical world also formulated traditions about early antiquity in similar fashion, using lists, genealogies, and accounts of primeval events such as creation, a flood, and earliest leaders. So in Mesopotamia among the Sumerians, and (in a different way) in Egypt, where the dynasty of the gods (with a destruction of mankind under Re) preceded the demi-gods and historic kings. But just as modern historical study fills out a history based on kings and queens of England and Scotland from 1066 to Queen Victoria (with episodes like the Black Death, Act of Union, etc.), so with the striking but necessarily circumscribed traditions in Genesis 1–11, early Sumer and Akkad, or ancient Egypt. Fresh dimensions are added to these traditions from the results of two lines of exploration – archaeological excavations, and the study of the body of ancient literary and religious written compositions.

TEN TO TWO THOUSAND YEARS BC

Barely fifty years ago, ancient Near Eastern (and world) history began about 3500/3000 BC (on today's dating) with the emergence of writing, and the prehistory that preceded it was of the vaguest practically everywhere except in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Following pioneer work in the thirties, widespread excavation throughout the Near East and intensive study in the last twenty-five years has transformed the whole picture. The newer methods of dating remains (Carbon–14, bristlecone pine ring-counts, etc.) have helped to provide a still-flexible outline of broad dates for well before 3000 BC.

Thus, before the earliest practicable date for an Abraham (about 2000 BC or so), there extends back through time an immense perspective of ancient cultures and civilisation for over 80 centuries back to about 10,000 BC or more. Of this long period, only the last 12 centuries (3200–2000 BC) – a little more than the 3rd millennium – stand increasingly in the full light of history because of the invention and use of writing. But the previous sixty eight centuries pulsate also with life and colour.

1. *Foundations of Culture, c. 10,000–6000 BC*

Before the tenth millennium BC, we know only of hunters, fishers, collectors of edible fruits and roots, of people living in caves and in temporary shelters – the so-called Palaeolithic ('Old Stone') and Mesolithic ('Middle Stone') Ages. But from roughly 9000 BC onwards, we find the first real settlements in the Near East, as peo-

ple gradually became keepers of goats, sheep or cattle, and learned to cultivate grain-crops. From this Neolithic ('New Stone') phase, a series of ancient towns has come to light in Palestine, Syria, Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Oldest Jericho became in time a walled township ten acres in extent, with massive watchtowers and round houses, for a population of perhaps 2000 people. The sheer mass of the stone-built defences, the economy based partly on local cultivation of irrigated ground and partly on trade, and the general material layout and quality of life – all suggest a well-organised community under effective leadership able to muster the common resources for major undertakings – and fearing jealous foes against whom defence was thought needful. Still later, when the old was long gone, a new population built a new town of rectangular houses with fine plastered floors (and using reed mats). [1] But pottery was one convenience that had not yet come into use in Palestine. In Syria, along the middle Euphrates, comparable townships arose at sites such as those known today as Mureybet and Tell Abu Hureyra, the latter being almost a city.

Far north in Anatolia, remarkable towns grew up at this early epoch (7th millennium if not earlier), at Hacilar (old settlement) and especially Catal Huyuk – a town-site of 32 acres, thrice as large as Jericho. Life here was enlivened with some of the world's earliest pottery. However, the only entry/exit of the houses was up and down ladders through a roof-hatch, hence no doubt some nasty falls, probably reflected in broken bones in the skeletons of former inhabitants. The excavator notes also a good number of head-wounds that may well have resulted from family and neighbours' quarrels, with people living so closely together – sad testimony to human nature in all ages! And possibly life was both stimulated and shadowed by sinister-seeming religious cults. A series of shrines bore paintings that included vulture-figures pecking at headless human bodies, and had clay-plastered bulls' heads, before which were laid baskets containing human skulls (prior to later burial?).

Westward in Cyprus, the oldest settlements at Khirokitia had a paved street, and 'upstairs-downstairs' beehive-domed houses. Eastward, in Mesopotamia, arose villages in the Zagros foothills (as at Jarmo) and townships in the steppes and central plains (like Umm Dabaghiyah). Thus, across a vast area, from central Europe and over the entire Near East into Iran and beyond the Caucasus, there grew up a vast swathe of local cultures based on agriculture and animal husbandry, sometimes partly at least on trade, building villages and towns of mud-brick, worshipping deities that personified natural forces (e.g., reproduction), and using a con-

siderable array of tools and furnishings, sometimes of a quality of finish or aesthetic appeal that still commands our admiration today.

2. *The Flowering of Pre-literate High Cultures, c. 6000–3200 BC*

From about 6000 BC onwards, the use of pottery steadily became universal in the ancient Near East, in a great variety of styles, forms and decoration, in different regions and cultures, and with the passage of time. Thus it becomes the archaeologist's handiest material indicator to follow the spread of cultural influence and to trace sequences of cultures down through time. From at least 6000 BC onwards, copper came into use for tools alongside stone. It first was used as native metal, hammered cold, but smelting and casting techniques made possible a wide range of uses. Conventionally, archaeologists sometimes speaks of this as the Chalcolithic Age ('Copper/Stone' Age). With the full use of copper and other metals, c. 3200 BC onwards, the rather misleading term 'Early Bronze Age' is customary, despite the lack of bronze at that early epoch.

In Palestine, the Chalcolithic age (*c.* 4000–3200 BC) is most famed for its technical achievements and religious art. Across the Jordan at Ghassul, several buildings had coloured frescoes on their plastered walls, perhaps illustrating local mythology: an eight-pointed star, strange bird-like figures, as well as geometric patterns and a group of human figures. To a temple at En-Gedi may have belonged such a ritual treasure as that found at Nahal Mishmar with its remarkable copper sceptres and processional (?) standards.[2] Technologically astonishing was the great desert township at Jawa in Transjordan, totally dependent upon an elaborate water-conservation system of dam, channels and pools.[3]

In Syria, sites that are famous in later periods, like Byblos and Ugarit (Ras Shamra), show the impact of the Halaf and Ubaid cultures of Mesopotamia. The whole period *c.* 5000 to 3200 BC witnessed the emerging brilliance of Mesopotamian culture, whose influence radiated out to Syria and southern Anatolia, as marked by the successive spread of pottery styles, be it the brilliant painted vessels of Halaf or Ubaid, or the plainer wares of the Uruk period. Throughout Mesopotamia we see the rise of cities centred upon impressive temples displaying the most spectacular architecture, from Eridu and Uruk (biblical Erech) in the 'deep South' to Gawra in the far north. The Sumerians may already have been the leading element in the population. Direct Mesopotamian influence already reached far west, to the westernmost bend of the Euphrates in Syria where a huge, purely Mesopotamian fortress a thousand metres long was built (*c.* 3300 BC) at Habuba el-Kabira – perhaps by order of some precursor of that archetypal Sumerian adventurer Gilgamesh! However, rival city-states rather than far-flung empires were already probably the rule in Mesopotamia. Finally, the use of pictures on pads of clay to keep accounts began the history of writing - and likewise the era of written history. In Egypt, a distinct agricultural civilistion arose in Valley and Delta; arrival of the concept of writing stimulated the invention of the hieroglyphs just before a southern king conquered also the north to found the first dynasty of the pharaonic monarchy about 3200 BC.

3. *The Brilliant Third Millennium, c. 3200–2000 BC*

Such, then, in the very barest, simplest outline, runs the story of the rise of civilisation for some sixty eight centuries or so, down to a point (the start of written history) still well over a thousand years before Abraham. During this final thousand years and more before 2000 BC, the civilisations of Egypt and Sumer reached their first peak of maturity and brilliant achievement.

In Egypt, the Old Kingdom or 'Pyramid Age' witnessed splendid stone architecture: temples of the gods, vast pyramids as tombs of the kings, these being surrounded by veritable streets and cities of tomb-chapels of the principal officials of the realm. The growing number of inscriptions attests a complex administration under the pharaoh and his vizier. Superb craftsmanship appears in the fine arts, jewellery, sculpture and painting. Writing skills extended beyond administration to other, more literary spheres. Narrative is represented by biographical inscriptions of officials in their tomb-chapels. Spells, hymns, and a variety of long and elaborate rituals make up much of the so-called 'Pyramid Texts' that were inscribed within the later pyramids of the period. A series of wisdom-writings (related in form and matter to Proverbs) probably originated at this time, although preserved to us in later copies so far.

In Mesopotamia, the Sumerian city-states lacked the political unity of Egypt, but rivalled her in all the arts, in sophisticated administration, and in pioneering the beginnings of literature. Besides word-lists and sign-lists, we have – again – wisdom-books and hymns, as well as brief royal inscriptions. During about 2400–2200 BC, the Semitic-speaking dynasty of Sargon of Akkad established an empire that controlled all of Mesopotamia and disputed the rule of the Middle Euphrates region with the great North-Syrian kingdom of Ebla. Collapse of the Akkad empire led to foreign (Gutian) domination, until the Sumerian Third Dynasty of Ur (*c.* 2100–2000 BC) reunited Mesopotamia in the last flowering of Sumerian political power. Under the rule of both Akkad and Ur,

all the arts, crafts and skills flourished, and much new literature was composed. It is mainly the hymnology that has so far survived to us from this, plus some royal inscriptions. After the fall of Ur, Mesopotamia split up into a series of rival city-states (Old-Babylonian period), with Semitic dynasties, increasingly of West-Semitic-speaking stock, called by the Babylonians 'Amurrites' (Amorites) or 'Westerners'. In this period of ferment, a vast amount of the most varied Sumerian literature was cultivated in the scribal schools, and Akkadian (Babylonian, rather than its sister Assyrian) gave birth to a vigorous literature in narrative (epic, legend), wisdom, hymnody and so on. A common culture was shared by Sumerians, Babylonians and Western Semites in Mesopotamia.

In the Levant – Anatolia, Syria, Palestine – city-states were the rule politically, with semi-nomadic pastoralists moving about in the fringe areas of the sedentary, agriculture-based mini-states. Mesopotamian cultural influence was felt in North Syria. This appears at Ebla, great rival of Akkad, whose vast archives used Sumerian script and language, besides going on to use cuneiform to write the local West-Semitic language. Those archives, too, include religious, narrative and wisdom literature. Unlike most of her neighbours, Ebla became a 'great power', able to challenge the Mesopotamian kings, during about 2400–2250 BC. Neither the Anatolian princedoms in the far north (among whom the Hittites were beginning to appear) nor the petty Palestinian city-states could match Ebla politically, but all had their own regional high culture materially.

4.   *The Perspective of Eighty Centuries*

These major civilisations, even when focused on urban centres, were still directly based upon agriculture and animal husbandry – upon the farmer and the pastoralist. In Palestine, Syria, and certainly Upper Mesopotamia, the cultivator and the herdsman were the two interdependent parts of the food-producing economy. In Syria and Mesopotamia, the cities were centres of political powers – of royal dynasties – but their satellite villages were the real centres of food-production. There lived the farmers, and around them (between winter and summer pastures) moved the herdsmen of sheep and cattle. This background is reflected in ancient texts, such as the Sumerian 'debates' between farmer and shepherd in friendly rivalry.[4] It needs to be remembered as the real economic and social background when reading the patriarchal and other narratives in the Old Testament. The patriarchs, for example, moved from Ur to Haran to Palestine, going from one pastoral/agricultural setting to

another. In the first two cases, from territory dependent on the cities of Ur and Har(r)an, in the third phase interacting with the local Palestinian city-states and communities.

What else from this vast epoch before 2000 BC is of significance for the beginnings of the biblical story? First, the sheer length of time – the many generations, century upon century. By 2000 BC, the civilised world was already *ancient*. Throughout the ancient Near East, cultures and civilisations rose and fell not once but many times over. Little wonder, then, that before Abraham the narratives in Genesis 1–11 look back through genealogies on repetitive patterns to 'in the beginning'.

Secondly, there was never a cultural vacuum in the ancient biblical East. Pastoralists and farmers lived in close contact, and both had intimate dealings with the central powers of their time and place, where and whenever that might be. The famous Mari archives of the early 2nd millennium BC merely illustrate at length conditions that were true there and widely elsewhere not only in the early 2nd millennium BC but also long centuries before and after. Those interconnections in everyday life, at local level and on several planes – governmental, personal, and so on – made it impossible for any ordinary pastoral group or farming community to life a life in isolation, hermetically sealed off from all influences and contacts with the immediate world around them. All were heirs to the 'precipitate' of what had gone before, and through continual contacts came to share in varying degrees in the cultural movements of their own places and times.

Back in the nineteenth century AD, Old Testament scholars (working themselves in a virtual vacuum) simply could not believe in figures like the patriarchs who seemed – to them – to belong in the night of prehistoric time. Or in a Moses who suddenly produced a series of institutions (laws, rituals, the tabernacle, etc.) as if from nowhere. For these and other reasons, such figures had to be devalued and treated as imaginary reflections from later times, say from *c.* 900 BC onwards. But this total lack of perspective-in-depth is now visibly and totally false. The night of prehistoric time faded not in 900 BC but nearer 9000 BC, culturally speaking. Thus someone in the position of a Moses did not have to pluck laws or a covenant out of thin air – such were formulated within the terms of the long and highly-developed modes of life already existing at the time; in the 13th century BC, that was eighty-seven centuries *after* those earliest experimental settlements at Jericho or elsewhere. As intimated above, even an Abraham in or after 2000 BC came also late in time, in a teeming, busy world with over eighty centuries of varied cultural experience behind it.

Thus, whether one lived as a pastoralist with regularly-moving flocks, as a farmer based on village and field, or in the city in their midst, one never lived in total isolation at any period during the full-blown cultures of the ancient Near East.

BACK TO THE BEGINNINGS

While archaeology by excavation of sites shows us the rich complexity of human life across innumerable generations, archaeology by the study of ancient literary texts brings us very much closer to the profile of remote antiquity offered in Genesis 1–11: creation of the world and of mankind, alienation of mankind from deity, flood, and renewal.

This series of topics, and in this sequence, finds its counterpart in early Mesopotamia, in a variety of literary works written by the Sumerians and Babylonians. Just over a century ago, George Smith aroused great excitement when he announced and published his *Chaldean Account of Genesis* (1876) and 'Chaldean account of the Deluge' (1872/73).[5] Thus began the modern recovery of two great Babylonian epics: *Enuma Elish* (completed by *c.* 1000 BC), recounting the triumph and creative work of Marduk god of Babylon, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (*c.* 17th century BC and later), whose hero Gilgamesh was told of the flood by its sole survivor. Both texts are available today, substantially complete, in modern translations.[6]

1. *The Creation*

In the early days, Old Testament scholars seized upon even trivial comparisons between Enuma Elish and Genesis 1–2. Thus, the Hebrew word *tehom*, 'the deep', was derived from *Ti'amat*, the goddess personifying the salt sea waters. However, this kind of support is much too fragile to sustain the theory of Hebrew dependence upon the Babylonian epic, a fact long since recognised. *Tehom/Ti'amat* are Common Semitic. Thus, *thm* occurs not only in Ugaritic in the 14th/13th centuries BC, but also now as *ti'amatum* in the archives of Ebla a thousand years earlier still[7]; in both cases, simply as a common noun, 'deep', 'ocean abyss'.

Even the theme of creation itself appears differently in Enuma Elish and in Genesis 1–2. In the latter, it is the sole theme of any importance. In Enuma Elish, the great theme is the supremacy won by Marduk, and creation (if more than an afterthought) is but one feature of his activity. Otherwise the two texts share little else but the 'banalities' of creation: the order of heaven and earth before plants, creatures and mankind is essential, to have somewhere to

put these latter! Plants, too, may be expected to be given before animals that eat them, and so forth. Light appears before named sources (e.g. sun, moon) in both accounts,[8] but otherwise the points of comparison turn out to be divergent or just commonplaces. Moreover, Enuma Elish itself is not *the* Babylonian account of creation, but merely a subsidiary offshoot of that tradition.[9] Other accounts exist in brief form. Hence, it is not surprising that Assyriological scholarship has by now largely rejected the old idea that Genesis 1–2 had any close relation at all with Enuma Elish. Such is essentially the verdict of Heidel, Kinnier-Wilson, Lambert, and Millard, for example.[10] Writers on the Old Testament who suggest the contrary are out-of-date.

The other principal Babylonian fragments concerned with creation are mainly of still later date (12th to 6th centuries BC in present copies), and diverge even more from what we find in Genesis. These include a bilingual (Sumerian/Babylonian) creation of man (*c.* 1200/800 BC) to be bondservant of the gods,[11] a fragment from Nineveh (7th century BC) mentioning the creation of two 'servants' (of the gods?),[12] another bilingual piece with Marduk as creator (6th century BC or earlier),[13] a brief prologue to an incantation against toothache (same date-range),[14] and finally a 'theogony' giving the generations of the gods (7th century BC, probably composed earlier).[15] None of these bears any but the slightest resemblance to the account in Genesis 1–2.

2. *The Flood*

Also long known is the Babylonian story of a great flood sent by the gods to wipe out a noisy and troublesome mankind, before which one god secretly warned his favourite to build a boat to save himself and his family from the impending deluge. From his vessel when marooned on Mt Nisir amid the watery wastes, the hero sent forth a dove, swallow and raven before being sure that the waters were receding. Once on *terra firma*, he then offered a sacrifice round which 'the gods gathered like flies', subsequently bestowing immortality upon him.

This is the story told by Ut-napishtim (in the Epic of Gilgamesh) to Gilgamesh, an ancient king of south-Babylonian Uruk in quest of immortality. The flood-story, thus, is only a secondary feature in this epic – and in fact only occurs (to date) in the 7th-century copies. Parallels between this Babylonian account, and Noah's flood in Genesis 6–8 are obvious to the eye. Thus, almost a century ago, it became commonplace to assume that the biblical account was simply copied or adapted from the Gilgamesh one, and that both in any case were purely folkloristic fiction. The only contrary

evidence seemed to be Woolley's controversial claim to have found traces of the legendary flood in a layer of silt at Ur.

However, this too-simple picture and the old assumptions have alike been overtaken by fuller information. Thus, a variety of flood deposits have been found at Mesopotamian sites other than Ur, usually of different dates from both the Ur deposit and each other. That at Ur is impressive in thickness, but may have been relatively 'local' even so. Combined with further literary evidence (see below), this increased archaeological information has been subjected to lively discussion. Some archaeologists have attempted in fact to identify and date the flood of Mesopotamian tradition (with which Noah's may be associated), considering that a real if distant event is in question, not solely a fiction. [16]

The inscriptional material is now much richer than just Gilgamesh. The oldest mention is probably that in the Sumerian King List, possibly in the first line of its original edition (*c.* 2000 BC): 'after the flood had swept over, when kingship was lowered from heaven . . .', followed by the list of kings after the flood. [17] In its 'second edition', the List was prefaced by a forty-line account of kings before the flood, giving the full sequence: pre-flood kings, flood, kings after the flood.

Then, by the 17th century BC at latest, there was composed the Semitic Old-Babylonian Epic of Atrakhasis, which originally included the fullest Babylonian account of the flood. [18] To about 1600 BC is dated the Sumerian flood-story, covering the same ground at one-quarter of the length (about 300 lines instead of 1245 lines). [19] A Babylonian tablet about the flood and mentioning Atrakhasis was found at ancient Ugarit on the Syrian coast, dated to the period *c.* 1400–1200 BC. [20] Finally, there is the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh with which we began. Most of this epic is attested by copies of the early 2nd millennium BC, but for Tablet XI (the flood) only 7th-century copies are known as yet. Thus, ancient Mesopotamia has passed on to us not one, but several, flood-accounts, of which one was studied as far away as Ugarit on the Syrian coast. [21]

What may we learn from all this? First, we have a multiplicity of accounts from Mesopotamia, with some variety in their treatment of the flood theme. None is absolutely identical with any other, still less with the account in Genesis 6–8. As any reader of both the Mesopotamian and Genesis narratives can verify personally, there is a clear outline in common and much difference in detail. The common framework includes: 1. Divine decision to send a punishing flood; 2. One chosen man told to save self, family and · creatures by building a boat; 3. A great flood destroys the rest of the people; 4. The boat grounds on a mountain; 5. Birds are sent

forth to determine availability of habitable land; 6. The hero sacrifices to deity; 7. Renewal of mankind upon earth.

The differences in detail are many, but include the following:

1. Cause: The Mesopotamian gods tire of the noisiness (not the sins) of mankind, and arbitrarily decide to sweep all mankind away (just or unjust); but in Genesis, God sees the corruption and universal wickedness of mankind, hence decides to punish this.

2. The Mesopotamian assembly of gods is at pains to conceal their flood plan entirely from mankind – this is not evident in Genesis at all.

3. The saving of the hero is entirely by trickery, by the deceit of one god behind his colleagues' backs in the Mesopotamian epics, *against* the orders of the entire divine assembly. In Genesis, God from the first tells Noah plainly, without subterfuge, that judgement comes and he alone has been judged faithful and so must build a boat.

4. The size and type of craft differ entirely in the various versions. That in Gilgamesh has the proportions of a vast cube, perhaps even of a great floating ziggurat (temple-tower); that in Genesis has far more the proportions of a real craft – and less vast than Berossus's one.

5. The duration of the flood differs in the Mesopotamian and biblical accounts. Thus, Atrakhasis has seven days and seven nights of storm and tempest, as does the Sumerian version; Gilgamesh has six (or seven) days and nights, with subsidence of the waters beginning on the seventh day; none of the Mesopotamian narratives give any idea of how long the flood-waters took to subside thereafter. In contrast, Genesis has an entirely consistent, [22] more detailed time-scale. After seven days' warning, the storm and floods rage for 40 days, then the waters stay for 150 days before beginning to sink, and further intervals follow, until the earth was dry a year and ten days after the cataclysm began (Gen. 7:11; 8:14).

6. The inhabitants of the boat include (besides animals, the hero and his family) also a pilot and craftsman, etc., in the Mesopotamian versions; in Genesis we find (besides animals) [23] only Noah and his immediate family.

7. The details of sending out birds differ entirely, as between Gilgamesh, Berossus, and Genesis 8:7 ff.; this is lost in Atrakhasis (if ever present).

8. The Mesopotamian hero leaves the boat of his own accord, and then offers a sacrifice to win the acceptance of the gods. By contrast, Noah stays in the boat *until* God summons him forth, and then presents what is virtually a sacrifice of thanksgiving (he

being already accepted personally) following which divine blessing is expressed without regret (contrast Enlil's initial anger over man's survival).

9. Replenishment of the land or earth is partly through renewed divine activity in Mesopotamia (cf. in Atrakhasis), but simply and naturally through the survivors themselves (Noah and family) in Genesis.

Thus, it is fair to say that the Mesopotamians — Sumerians, Babylonians and Western Semites— had a flood-tradition in common, which existed and was transmitted in several versions. To talk of borrowing the Hebrew from the Babylonian (or Sumerian) or vice-versa seems excluded. Parallel traditions about some ancient event in common Mesopotamian memory would be a simpler and more satisfying answer. The Genesis account is in no way more 'evolved' than its neighbours, and often reads more simply. In terms of length, for example, its 60 verses (Gen. 6:9 – 8:22) might be roughly equal to 120 lines of Sumerian or Akkadian text. In contrast, the relevant parts of Atrakhasis (in Tablets II and III) were originally at least some 370 lines long, and that in Gilgamesh XI some 200 lines long; only the relatively brief Sumerian account was 120 lines long or originally a little more. In other words, Genesis 6–8 was probably the simplest and shortest of all the ancient versions, possibly originating as early as they, and was certainly not a secondary elaboration of them.

Secondly, the Sumerians and Babylonians of *c.* 2000/1800 BC believed so firmly in the former historical occurrence of such a flood – in a land plagued by floods until modern times – that they inserted it into the Sumerian King List, and not merely in their epic tales. In the second and final form of that list, the flood was a bench-mark between kings before, and kings after, the flood.[24] Thus, as already noted above, it is not surprising to find authorities in Mesopotamian archaeology and history such as Mallowan or Hallo seriously essaying to date the flood of tradition. Pure fiction hardly seems likely, as a solution.

Thirdly, an agnostic note. It is, of course, impossible to dogmatize on the extent of the flood of Mesopotamian or biblical tradition. In the latter case, the word *'eres* covers in usage so broad a field from 'land' (limited location) to 'earth' (the known world) that it is unwise to opt for any extreme solution. Again, it is a sheer waste of time looking for remains of the ark on modern Mt Ararat, because the biblical text does not locate it there – it clearly says 'the mountains (plural) of Ararat' in Gen. 8:4, which name covers a whole vast region. The ultimate reality behind the narrative does not rest on wild-goose-chases of that kind.

3. *Primeval Proto-history*

However, the background importance of the Mesopotamian traditions of creation and flood is not restricted to these topics just in isolation. Of equal interest is their part in the overall tradition about the 'most ancient past' in both Genesis and Mesopotamia. In Genesis 1–11, we find the sequence of creation (1–2), man's alienation from God (3–4), linked by a ten-generation genealogy (5) to the flood and renewal (6–9). With the spread of mankind (10–11:9), a further nine-generation genealogy from Noah's son Shem to Abram's father Terah (Gen. 11:10–25) provides the link with the 'founding father' Abraham.

A similar outline (creation linked to flood, linked to later times) appears also in the early Mesopotamian works, as a literary whole.

The oldest, the Sumerian King List, presupposes creation, beginning with 'When kingship was lowered from heaven', and continues with a line of eight (or ten) kings[25], until 'the flood swept over (all)'. Then kingship was again lowered from heaven, and the long line of royal dynasties continues down into well-known historical times, to *c.* 2000/1800 BC. But from *c.* 1700 BC at latest, it is the narrative Atrakhasis Epic which presents the closest analogy.[26] In a world already created, the gods fashion mankind to take over life's drudgery (cleaning canals, preparing food, etc.). Mankind becomes so numerous that Enlil the chief god decides to decimate them by plague, drought and famine – alienation had set in. Each time, the god Enki reveals to his favourite, Atrakhasis, a way to escape these blights. Likewise, when Enlil and the gods send the flood, Enki counsels Atrakhasis to build a boat. Afterwards, Enlil is reconciled to the survival of mankind, and arrangements are made for their continuance; the whole is comprised within an epic originally 1,245 lines long. Much shorter (about 300 lines) was the Sumerian 'flood story' (*c.* 1600BC), on a badly-damaged tablet. This shows the same basic outline as Atrakhasis: [created world], creation of mankind and five cities, [alienation], the pious hero told to save himself by boat, in the flood, and re-establishment of human life (the hero, immortalized). We may tabulate as follows:

Sumerian King-L	Atrakhasis	Sumerian Flood	Genesis 1-11
A: (Creation &) kingship	(Creation &) mankind	[Creation &] mankind	Creation, incl. mankind
list:	narrative: alienation	narrative: alienation	narrative: alienation, genealogy.
·(8/10 names)			
B: Flood new start,	Flood new start,	Flood new start,	Flood new start,

(Sumerian King-L)	(Atrakhasis)	(Sumerian Flood)	(Genesis 1-11)
kingship	*mankind*	*mankind*	*mankind*
list:	...	...	*genealogy*
C: *Historic*	*(Epic,*	*(Epic,*	*Abram's clan*
dynasties	*c.17th ct.)*	*c.17th ct.)*	*(c.2000/1700)*
(c.2000/1800)			

This table illustrates the comparisons and contrasts between the three traditions (King List, Mesopotamian epics, Genesis (W. Semitic) account). In effect, we find the common theme of protohistory (creation, crisis, continuance, of man) treated in several ways. In Sumerian, in both king list and narrative; in Akkadian, in narrative; and in West Semitic, in narratives linked by genealogies. Each component in the population of early 2nd-millennium Mesopotamia (Sumerians, Babylonians, Western Semites) contributed its formulation of inherited traditions, and it seems most probable that the West-Semitic version took shape in Mesopotamia[27] before being taken westward to Canaan by such as the early Hebrews like Terah and Abram. [28]

The King List and Genesis genealogies show instructive similarities and contrasts. Thus, before and after the flood, the Sumerian King List uses slightly different formulae to introduce and terminate successive dynasties. Likewise, there are differences in formula between the genealogies of Gen. 5 and 11 before and after the flood. It is interesting to recall that the pre-flood section of the King List was originally a distinct composition, prefaced to the List in its '2nd edition'; in Genesis, chapter 5 belongs to 'the document of the succession of Adam', while the genealogy in 11:10 ff. belongs to the 'succession of Shem' – the phrase 'these are the generations (or, succession) of *X*' is a well-known marker of successive sections in the present book of Genesis, almost like a series of tablets.[29] Again, both in the King List and in Genesis, one finds 'notes' included on some of the people listed. These indicate, not some kind of multiple authorship, but the compiler's wish to transmit traditions he valued, or which characterised the person named.

These affinities agree well with the thesis of a common literary heritage, formulated in each case in Mesopotamia in the early 2nd millennium BC. A West-Semitic tradition of such age can be no novelty now, in the light of still earlier West-Semitic writings at Ebla, *c.* 2300 BC. One may further notice the number of generations and kings, respectively, in Genesis 5 and the pre-flood section of the Sumerian King List, ten in the former and eight or ten in the latter. In either case, the eight or ten names represent a long time-lapse rather than literally that number.[30] The same applies to the

nine generations after the flood (Gen. 11) and to the Sumerian post-flood dynasties, known to be incomplete. Some set in sequence were actually contemporary, while others (independently known) are not listed.[31] Proper caution in interpretation is called for in Genesis 5 and 11, where there is no guarantee that the phrase 'A begot B' always meant that A was literal father of B. Such a phrase can indicate simply that 'A begot (the lineage descending to) B', with the given names as representatives of a far longer series. Other biblical passages bear out such usage. Inside Genesis itself, 'the children that Zilpah bore to Jacob' (Gen. 46:18) actually include great-grandsons. The datum 'Joram begot Uzziah' (Matthew 1:8) summarises the fuller lineage whereby Joram actually fathered Ahaziah, father of Joash, father of Amaziah, father of Uzziah (cf. 2 Kings 8:25; 11:2; 14:1, 21), precisely as suggested may apply to Genesis 5 and 11.

Even so, where does that leave characters like Methuselah with 969 years to his credit (Gen. 5:27), or early Sumerian rulers whose reigns in the List range from a few hundred years back to some with 28,000 years or more? First impulse is to dismiss the lot; archaeological data, however, counsel patience and caution, not impulse.

Thus, for decades, no-one took the Sumerian King List at all seriously.[32] Then came Jacobsen's masterly edition of that list, plus Kramer's editions of the Sumerian Gilgamesh cycle of stories, and recovery of the Tummal Chronicle in which Gilgamesh appears amongst historical rulers of early Ur. Cuneiform historians came round to the view that early figures like Gilgamesh might have been real people after all, even if embellished by later legend. [33]

Proof positive came in 1959, when Edzard published an original inscription belonging to the reign of (En)mebaragisi[34], an early king of the city of Kish, and identified a second fragment of that reign. [35] *This* worthy was clearly an historical ruler, yet the Sumerian King List credits him with a reign of 900 years – a close rival to Methuselah! From this situation, one fact emerges with crystal clarity. Incredibly high numbers of years (whether reigns or lifespans) attached to a name in later documents do *not* prove that the person concerned was unhistorical. Whatever the origins of such numbers (which need study), this point on historicity has been clear to Sumerologists and Assyriologists for decades.[36] Thus, in Genesis too, the high numbers remain unaccountable at present, but likewise they constitute in themselves *no* adequate reason for rejecting the possible historicity of Abraham's remote ancestors. Methuselah and his kin may have been as real once as Enmebaragisi and Gilgamesh. Eber for example (Gen. 11:15–17) has

been compared with Ebrum, king of Ebla (*c.* 2300 BC); the name is most likely identical (but for an archaic ending), but the individuals almost certainly were not.

While fruitful comparisons are thus possible between early Genesis and such documents as the Sumerian King List, yet both remain entirely independent documents with numerous basic differences which preclude any direct relationship beyond a common basic concept of protohistory. The Sumerian List is a list of unrelated, often non-successive, royal dynasties; early Genesis enshrines the linear genealogy of entirely private individuals.

At this point, we turn from the Sumerians and Akkadians (Babylonians) again to the third component in early Mesopotamia – the Western Semites, known to the Sumerians as Martu and to the Babylonians as Amurrites ('Amorites'), both terms meaning simply 'Westerners'. It has long been known that such people formed part of the population no later than the Third Dynasty of Ur (*c.* 2113–2006 BC), with whose fall the way was open for West Semitic or 'Amorite' leaders to establish themselves as local kings in several cities of Babylonia, founding new dynasties ruling rival city-states. To such a dynasty belonged the famous Hammurabi of Babylon. Of this king and his elder contemporary and rival, Shamshi-Adad I, King of Assyria, we possess remarkable and interlocking genealogies that reach back not less than 26 or 27 generations before these two kings – well over twice the number of named generations in Genesis 5 and 11 put together. The Babylonian document was composed for Hammurabi's great-grandson, to honour the latter's ancestors with funerary offerings to their memory.[37] The Assyrian document was incorporated into the later Assyrian King List, within which it appears in special sections,[38] and was linked to the first 17 kings of Assyria[39] 'who lived in tents'. The earliest sections have been regarded as artificial, and several names as merely corrupt or invented – e.g., Tudiya, who begins the Assyrian King List. However, this very same Tudiya is now known to be strictly historical, and to have lived *c.* 2350 BC when he made a treaty with the King of Ebla (see Chapter 3). Thus, with Hammurabi and Shamshi-Adad, we have a genealogical tradition parallel in form and concept with that in Gen. 11 and known to be historical at least at its beginning.

4. *Date of the Primeval Traditions*

One fact stands out especially clearly on dating. Nearly all of our principal sources and examples come from the early 2nd millennium BC (*c.* 2000–1600 BC). This is true of the Sumerian King List, the Sumerian 'flood story', the Epic of Atrakhasis, and

the major part of Gilgamesh. It was an especially fruitful period for literature in Mesopotamia. Older Sumerian literature was being recorded in final written form, Semitic Babylonian literature was at the best of its creative brilliance,[40] and the Western Semites proudly retained record of their family traditions (cf. previous paragraph). Positively, one can conceive of no more fitting epoch for the original composition in literary form of most of the traditions now found in Genesis 1–11. Negatively, it is worth noticing the changed conditions, different interests, and even unsuitability, of later periods of ancient history. Thus, the creation-stories in Mesopotamia from *c.* 1100 BC onwards diverge from what we find in Genesis. And the grouped themes of creation, flood, primeval history, ceased to inspire new writers and new works. Alone, in the 7th century BC, the 'Dynastic Chronicle' retained the form of the Sumerian King List, adding-in some account of the flood, and continuing the long list of Babylonian dynasties to nearer its own time.[41] During the 1st millennium BC, other king-lists in Assyria and Babylonia never normally bothered to go back to either the flood or the creation. Generally, the 1st-millennium scribes were content to recopy and conserve the earlier works created in the 2nd millennium BC. Concerning the possible relation of early Genesis to Mesopotamian tradition, a leading cuneiform scholar long ago pointed out that[42] 'The [Babylonian] exile and the later part of the [Hebrew] monarchy are out of the question ... That the matters spoken of were included in Genesis is proof that they were long established among the Hebrews'.[43] In short, the idea that the Hebrews in captivity in Nebuchadrezzar's Babylon (6th century BC) first 'borrowed' the content of early Genesis at that late date is a non-starter. By the time of the Babylonian exile and after, the forms of history-writing had changed. In a *real* post-exilic book like Chronicles, the whole of primeval antiquity down to Abraham's grandson Jacob/Israel is covered in just one initial chapter (1 Chron. 1:1–52), almost entirely of genealogies, in which neither the creation nor the flood are even mentioned, let alone any other 'primeval' details. The focus of interest of its author (*c.* 400 BC) lay in much later periods of biblical history. Thus, whenever it reached its present form within the entire book of Genesis, the unit Gen. 1–11 best finds its literary origins in the early 2nd millennium BC.

5. *Conclusions*

The earliest narratives in Genesis appear to be neither late concoctions nor mere bowdlerizations of Mesopotamian legend. They and their nearest Mesopotamian relatives almost certainly offer

lines of parallel and largely independent witness to ancient traditions held in common by the Sumerian, Akkadian and West-Semitic population-elements in Mesopotamia from very early epochs down to the early 2nd millennium BC, when those ancient traditions were celebrated in a series of literary works, in Sumerian (King List; flood), Akkadian (the epics), and West Semitic (first version of Gen. 1–11; Ebla??). These peoples firmly believed in divine creation, and in divine punishment expressed in a particular flood as a distant historical event, distinct from the ordinary, habitual inundations known in Mesopotamia. It is possible to prove the historicity of some early figures (Enmebaragisi; Tudiya), and to postulate it purely rationally for others (e.g., Gilgamesh), regardless of 'problem elements' such as long reigns or lifespans. The optimum date for the literary compositions in view (early second millennium BC) agrees well with that general date for the Hebrew patriarchs – Terah and Abram – shown as going westward from Mesopotamia. They could well have carried such traditions westward with them, hence their impress in the later book of Genesis. They would not have been precocious in so doing. The finds at Ebla of three to five centuries earlier show that Mesopotamian lore (including much literary and scholarly lore) had already travelled west long since. The finds of cuneiform fragments in Middle Bronze Age Hazor in Canaan proper (as well as of a Gilgamesh fragment in mid-2nd-millennium Megiddo) further illustrate the westward movement of such written traditions, and their relatively early currency among Semites in the 'westlands' of the Levant at such a date.

3

Ebla – Queen of Ancient Syria

Like a brilliant mirage shimmering across the desert sands, the teeming ancient city of Ebla[1] has now emerged in something of its ancient splendour from the veil of sand and mud that entombs the huge ruin-mound known today as Tell Mardikh in North Syria, some 44 miles (70 km) south of Aleppo.

THE FIRST DECADE

However, the spectacular discoveries at Ebla are no mirage. Rather, they are the just reward of over ten years of systematic, dedicated work by the Italian archaeological expedition to Syria led by Professor Paolo Matthiae. Impressed by the huge size (140 acres) and prominent position of Tell Mardikh, Matthiae began a long-term 'dig'. For the first ten years (1964–1974), he successfully explored key areas of the then-unidentified ancient city. The lozenge-shaped mound had once been a walled town with four gateways, several temples, and large areas of private houses – all of mud brick – around a higher citadel or 'acropolis' in the centre. Here, in the 'city centre', he found remains of a palace on the north side, and of yet another temple towards the west side.

On the time-scale of antiquity, the history of the city could be traced level by level, beginning with a prehistoric settlement ('I') and a first town on the acropolis site ('IIA'), within about 3500–2400 BC. Then came two periods when the city first reached

its full extent, with town-houses and temples around the acropolis crowned with its palace and main temple, *c.* 2400–2000 BC ('IIB', phases 1 & 2); each period ended with massive destruction, and then a rebuilding. Thus, from *c.* 2000–1600 BC, phoenix-like, the city again rose from its ashes, over its full area ('IIIA & B') before being devastated once more. Thereafter, it was a much humbler community that clung to the central acropolis through three more cultural periods for the next sixteen centuries ('IV', 1600–1200 BC; 'V', 1200–530 BC; 'VI', 530–60 BC). In Roman and Arabic times, the mound finally went to sleep, used only for a few poor burials ('VII', AD).

All this (with much valuable detail) was very welcome to archaeologists and ancient historians, although it hardly made headlines. Then in 1968 there was found a broken royal statue inscribed in Akkadian cuneiform, dedicated to the goddess Ishtar by Ibbit-Lim, king of Ebla. Did the huge mounds of Tell Mardikh conceal the ancient city of Ebla? The geographical range of Ebla as a North-Syrian city, so far known from inscriptions as far afield as Sumer and Egypt, was feasible. The history of Ebla as profiled in these sources also fitted the fortunes of Tell Mardikh: a great city subdued by the mighty Sargon of Akkad *c.* 2300 BC, destroyed by his grandson Naram-Sin *c.* 2250 BC, and much less important in later times. As the archaeological, inscriptional and geographical evidence all seemed to fit, Matthiae and his cuneiform colleague Pettinato favoured this identification of the site. Elsewhere in the world, scholars disagreed amongst themselves, some for, some against, as scholars will ...!

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

But the debate was stopped in its tracks in 1974/75. New excavations on the west side of the acropolis showed that the base of a large square tower was part of another royal palace.[2] The tower occupied the north-east corner of a great Court of Audience. A richly-decorated ceremonial staircase down the inside of the tower led to a throne-dais, sheltered by a colonnade along the north wall of the court. South from the tower ran the east wall of the court, also with a colonnade. Halfway along it, three steps through a doorway led into further buried rooms of the palace.

Discovery of this huge 'new' palace where once the kings of Ebla sat in state to hold audience was remarkable – but much more was to come. In 1974, a room (no. 2506) just north of the tower yielded 42 clay tablets and fragments inscribed in cuneiform.[3] By their script, all belonged to about 2300 BC, contemporary with the em-

pire of Akkad in Mesopotamia, far to the east. Forty-one of the tablets were essentially administrative accounts for various products, especially metals, textiles, wood and pottery. The real surprise was the language used in the tablets. Alongside the traditional Sumerian terminology borrowed from Mesopotamia, the scribes also wrote entries in their own language – Eblaite. This proved to be a North-West Semitic dialect, showing close links in its grammar and vocabulary with later biblical Hebrew, Canaanite and Phoenician. Dated at around 2300 BC, Eblaite is the oldest-known language of this group, up to 1000 years before the tablets of Ugarit, for example. In biblical terms, it is 500 years before the patriarchs, 1000 years before Moses, 16 centuries before Isaiah, 20 centuries before Alexander the Great. For the present, therefore, Professor Pettinato has classified the 'new' language (Eblaite) as 'Early Canaanite' or 'Palaeo-Canaanite'.

In 1975, the leads given by these finds were confirmed in astonishing fashion. At the north end of the great court's eastern colonnade, a small room yielded 1000 tablets and fragments, while a second room nearer the south end contained up to another 14,-000 tablets and fragments. These lay row upon row, just where they had fallen from the burning wooden shelves when the palace was destroyed by Naram-Sin's troops about 2250 BC.[4] This overwhelming mass of written documents, some 15,000 all told, was conveyed in 100 caseloads to the museum in Aleppo. From preliminary reports on the first ten thousand or so tablets by Prof Pettinato, and accounts of the archaeology of the site by Prof Matthiae, it is possible to sketch an outline of Ebla and its 'empire' at the height of its power and glory. What follows is based upon their first-hand reports in Italian, French, German and English, omitting the more dubious flourishes in secondary sources.

THE CITY AND SOCIETY OF EBLA (*c.* 2300 BC)

From about 2400 BC until about 1650/1600 BC, ancient Ebla probably occupied the whole of its 140-acre site, the entire city being surrounded by strong walls, pierced by four great city gates of varying size. Dominating the main area of the 'lower city' from its higher position at the centre, there rose the 'acropolis' or citadel – the nerve-centre of government where the royal palaces and administration were located. With the archaeological remains of walls, gates and buildings can be combined data from the tablets. One tablet in particular[5] permits us to see in outline the organization of this city which, at one period, had a population of 260,000 people.[6] The acropolis or 'governorate' contained four main cen-

tres. First was the *Palace of the King*. This doubtless comprised the actual residence of the king, queen and royal family, besides the central offices for Ebla's state administration and 'foreign office' — as illustrated by the archives themselves, hard by the great court of audience. To run this, we hear of 10 leading officials with 60 subordinates or 'dependants' — six aides per leader. Second was the *Palace of the City*. This bureau probably ran the affairs of the city of Ebla itself (as distinct from the wide-ranging territories beyond). Its staff too had 10 leaders, but with just 55 subordinates. These two corps of officials belonged to one common function whose role has not yet been worked out. Third was the *Stables* — most likely the focus of the immense commercial activity of Ebla, with merchants and emissaries travelling to and fro, between Ebla and innumerable foreign cities and kingdoms. This institution possessed no fewer than 63 leaders, but these had only 60 aides between them (one each, but for three without any). Fourth was the *Palace of Service* (?) or *of Servants* (?) — possibly the offices that handled the labour-supply for running the city and state administration. It had 20 leaders with 35 aides (2 each for 15 leaders, only one each for the other 5). It is clear that the more numerous leaders in the Stables and Services 'ministries' were of lesser status (only 1 or 2 aides each), concerned with more mundane affairs than the civil service 'mandarins' in the Royal and Municipal 'palaces' with 5 or 6 aides each. Correspondingly, the leaders in the Stables and Services departments bore a title (Sumerian *ú-a*; Akkadian *zaninu*) meaning 'providers' — they were responsible for supplies (food, income, etc.) for their 'ministries'. Thus, the royal citadel or acropolis hummed with state affairs and bureaucratic activity — perhaps with 4,700 people working there according to one tablet. [7]

On the acropolis reigned the King, usually denoted by the Sumerian term *en*, 'lord', corresponding to Eblaite *malik*, 'king' (cf. Hebrew *melek*). By his side, the Queen (Eblaite *maliktum*, cf. Hebrew *malka/maleket*) shared in state affairs, as did the crown prince (home affairs) and the son second-in-succession (foreign affairs). [8] In dealing with other rulers, the kings of Ebla used a two-tier system. Kings who were their equals they called *en/malik*, 'sovereign', like themselves. Vassals or local kinglets of lesser power and status they called *lugal* (Sumerian, 'chief man', 'king') or *diku* ('judge').

So much for the 'upper crust' on the acropolis. What of the 'lower city'? This, too, was divided into four 'quarters' or city-districts, each with a main city gate. Absolute certainty is not yet possible in identifying the named gates and districts with those dis-covered archaeologically. However, the first or *City District* [9] with

the 'City Gate' (north-west one) and the *2nd District* with the 'Sipish Gate' [10] (north-east one) had each 20 leaders with 100 and 98 subordinates respectively (5 aides per leader, again), com-parable in status with their chief colleagues on the acropolis. Smallest was the *3rd District*, having only 10 leaders and 30 aides (only 3 per leader), perhaps in the south-west quarter (? Dagan Gate). Of middle rank was the *4th District* (? and Reshep Gate; southeast area?), with 20 leaders and 50 aides. So, like any great city, Ebla probably had its favoured and lesser neighbourhoods — 'residential' and otherwise. The first three districts and their 50 leaders came under a separate (chief) inspector. The Eblaite word for these numerous sectional leaders or officers is *nase* — same as the Hebrew *nasi*, 'leader', 'ruler', in the Old Testament (cf. below). In the tablet that lists them, they are assigned grain-rations of half a measure each, using a term hitherto unknown.

This tablet is a representative of the first, and largest, group of documents in the Ebla archives: administrative and economic texts. These include many such 'ration-lists' for palace personnel, envoys to and from foreign parts, and offerings for the gods and their tem-ples. Well represented is agriculture: grain-crops, vineyards, cattle-raising. Even more so, 'industry': metalworking (gold, silver, cop-per), gems, textiles, wood-working and pottery. Foreign trade in metalware and textiles was recorded on huge 'supertablets' over a foot square (35 × 30 cm), bearing up to 30 columns of text (up to 50 lines each) on each face of a tablet — some 6,000 lines of inscrip-tion per tablet! Business ledgers indeed, for the 'balance of payments'! [11]

Home affairs represent one side of a second class of tablets: historical and judicial texts. These include letters between high officials on matters of state, royal decrees, legal contracts of sale and purchase, and of division of property, plus collections of laws — centuries older than those of Ur-Nammu of Ur or of Hammurabi of Babylon. Politically important marriages and appointments to office also feature.

THE HISTORY AND WORLD HORIZONS OF EBLA
(c. 2400–1650 BC)

1. *The Clash of Empires: Ebla and Akkad (c. 2400–2250 BC)*
Until the great discoveries of 1975, no-one had even the slightest inkling of the former power of Ebla in the 24th/23rd centuries BC. In that epoch of ancient and world history, it was another power entirely that seemed to have the world stage to itself: the empire of Akkad. [12] During most of the third millennium BC, ancient

Mesopotamia saw the brilliant flowering of Sumerian civilization, divided politically among a series of rival city-states: Ur, Kish, Lagash, Uruk, and others. But after serving at the court of the king of Kish, a Semite (Akkadian) set himself up as a king – Sargon [13] – in a new city of his own: Akkad or Agade. Sargon of Akkad brought the whole of Mesopotamia under his sway, to the Persian or Arabian Gulf, and pushed north and west to Mari and the borders of Syria and Anatolia. He thus founded the first-ever Semitic empire, about 2350 BC. He briefly subdued Ebla, with other cities. At Sargon's death, two of his sons successively lost most of their father's empire, and it was his grandson Naram-Sin (*c.* 2250 BC) who restored the dominion of Akkad to its full extent, marching westward and destroying Ebla – which he hailed as a great victory. How great was not known in modern times until 1975 ...

The archives of Ebla show now that the world stage was not monopolized by Akkad; the limelight was originally shared equally with Ebla. The following table may help in appreciating the revised history of the epoch. [14]

EBLA	MARI	ASSYRIA	AKKAD
(?Gumalum)			
Igrish-Halam			
Irkab-Damu	Iblul-Il		
Ar-Ennum [15]	Enna-Dagan		
	(of Ebla)		
Ebrum		Tudiya	Sargon
Ibbi-Sipish			Rimush
	Shura-Damu		Manishtushu
	(of Ebla)		
Dubuhu-Ada			
			Naram-Sin

Of the first Eblaite king named above – Gumalum – nothing is yet known, not even his proper date. [16] The first well-placed king, Igrish-Halam, reigned unchallenged over Ebla and north Syria while Sargon had not yet arisen to conquer either the Sumerian city-states or more distant lands. Irkab-Damu sought to build up a strong mercenary army, seeking to obtain good soldiers from Hamazi, far away to the east. [17] After a promising start, Ar-Ennum was less fortunate. Further east, on the middle Euphrates, King Iblul-Il of Mari had gained control over Assyria. But then Ar-Ennum of Ebla sent his general Enna-Dagan eastwards, who con-

quered the new-born 'empire' of Mari, compelling Iblul-Il to pay a massive tribute to Ebla of 11,000 lbs weight of silver and 880 lbs of gold. Enna-Dagan was then put in charge of Mari, as subject of Ar-Ennum of Ebla. But, by now, Sargon of Akkad had won control of all southern Mesopotamia, and was now looking northwestwards to Syria and Anatolia, sources of valuable timber and metal. He conquered Assyria, then Mari, northernmost Syria, and hammered on the gates of Ebla itself, whose submission and tribute he exacted, [18] perhaps before claiming sovereignty up to the Taurus Mountains and returning in triumph to Akkad.

The defeat of Ar-Ennum probably cost him his throne. Instead, the powerful dignitary Ebrum took over the rule of Ebla. Whether or not he was a son of Ar-Ennum, we do not know. However, the new king diligently restored the widespread rule of Ebla throughout north Syria and beyond. In due time, in Sargon's old age or after his death, Ebrum once more extended the sway of Ebla eastwards. He [19] again subdued Mari as his predecessor had done, installing his son Shura-Damu as vassal-king there. This time, the empire of Akkad under Sargon's son Rimush was powerless to reply – the new ruler of Akkad was too beset by revolts nearer home to worry about lands in the distant north-west. Going one step further, the ambitious Ebrum succeeded in imposing an international commercial treaty upon a new king of Assyria, Tudiya, who was definitely the lesser partner. Hitherto, Tudiya had been known to us only as the first name in the Assyrian King List, first of 'seventeen kings who lived in tents', so remote did he and they seem in later tradition. This treaty is but one of several international treaties found in the Ebla archives, heralds of seventeen centuries of ancient Near Eastern treaties. This one contains an introduction, listing the leading dignitaries of Ebla, then proceeds in twenty paragraphs of main text with the founding and regulation of a commercial centre (*karum*) and its merchants, and ends with a splendid curse-formula as sanction upon the Assyrian king, should he break the treaty – clearly making him virtually Ebla's vassal. [20] Such, now, was the triumph of Ebla that even Akkad itself paid tribute – perhaps not from the capital but from some northern province only, to buy off Ebla's encroachments. During the troubled reigns of Sargon's sons Rimush and Manishtushu, the eyes of Akkad looked south and east, leaving the north-west to Ebla's supremacy.

Now, in the relatively long reigns of Ebrum and his son and successor Ibbi-Sipish, was the golden age of the 'empire' of Ebla. From almost all quarters of the ancient Near East, messengers, merchants and tributaries formed the sinews of the influence and power of Ebla. Most of Syria west to the Mediterranean, south to

Hamath, north well beyond Aleppo,[21] and east to Mari and Assyria, was ruled by the kings of Ebla, mainly through vassals. But commercial and trading relations reached much further. Northwards, Ebla's envoys climbed through the Taurus mountains onto the Anatolian plateau to trade with the famous centre at Kanesh and even to Hattu(sa)[22] – future Hittite capital seven centuries into the future. Eastwards, along or within the upper and middle Euphrates, we meet with cities like Carchemish, Urshu, Nahur, Mari and Tuttul.[23] Southwards through Syria, via Hamath inland and ports like Ugarit or Byblos or Tyre on the coast, Ebla's commercial tentacles reached on into Palestine, already termed 'Canaan'.[24] Familiar names appear: Hazor, Megiddo, Dor, Joppa, Lachish, Gaza, all the way south to Sinai itself. An Ashtarot is perhaps the Ashteroth-Qarnaim located in Transjordan in Genesis 14:6. Salim (or rather, Urusalim) is almost certainly the Salim (later, Jerusalem) of Genesis 14:18, some five or six centuries before its next occurrence in the 'Execration Texts' from Egypt, c. 1800 BC.[25] Only Egypt, proud, aloof, and independent under the Sixth-Dynasty pharaohs of the 'pyramid age', seems not yet to occur on Ebla's wide horizons. But, apart from Lebanese timber and Sinai's minerals, the interest of the pharaohs was oftener directed far south up the Nubian Nile.

The reign of Ibbi-Sipish's son, Dubuhu-Ada, may have been short. By now, however, Sargon's grandson Naram-Sin ruled in Akkad and sought to restore his ancestor's domains in full. At home, Ebla's nearest vassal, the ruler of Armi (Aleppo), seemed now more powerful than his lord. At length, when Naram-Sin marched west, he defeated the hired levies of Ebla, ransacked and destroyed the once great city, about 2250 BC. The great commercial network of Ebla collapsed completely under the blow, leaving Naram-Sin 'king of the four quarters' of the known world, as his titles proudly proclaim him. However, in later years, Naram-Sin in turn suffered eclipse as his unwieldy empire broke up around him, and his son's reign ended in a chaos of usurpers, so that in a few decades the empire of Akkad followed that of Ebla into oblivion.

2.   *The Later Ages of Ebla (c. 2250–1600 BC)*

Akkad was never to rise again, and its very site is lost to this day. But after a brief interval, Ebla was rebuilt to its former extent (level IIB, 2), and regained something of its former municipal splendour, but not its political power. The acropolis had a new palace on the north side. On the west, a massive new ceremonial stairway led up over the buried ruins of the former palace (with its 15,000 tablets . . .) to a restored main temple. In Syria, political supremacy

lay with other city-states (such as Aleppo). In Mesopotamia, the Third Dynasty of Ur held sway, whose influence reached as far west as Byblos,[26] but without the military pressure of the Akkad conquerors.

About 2000 BC, Ebla was again sacked and again rebuilt (level III). Massive brick fortifications crowned a smoothed-off mud, sloping rampart all round (pierced as ever by the four gates), to defend the city, its temples, and yet another new palace on the acropolis. Of the kings of Ebla about 1900 BC, we know only the names of Igrish-Khepa and his son Ibbit-Lim. The latter set up a statue to the goddess Ishtar in her temple, in 'the 8th year of Ishtar'. But Ebla now was a satellite of Aleppo, capital of the strong kingdom of Yamkhad, often mentioned in the vast archives of Mari in the 18th century BC (but Ebla, never). Finally, in the 17th century BC, the Hittite king Hattusil I reduced the power of Aleppo, and his son Mursil I sacked it – and at the same time probably Ebla as well, by about 1600 BC. Henceforth, Ebla was a mere village on its acropolis down to Persian and Hellenistic times.

THE CULTURE OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF EBLA
(c. 2300 BC)

1.   *Schools and Scholars*

To maintain the elaborate fabric of government and society, the 'empire' of Ebla needed skilled scribes. Thus, the royal archives contained special works of reference, based on Sumerian models current in Mesopotamia since at least 2500 BC. Besides paradigms of verbs in Sumerian and Eblaite, these tablets included 'lexical' texts: long classified lists of the Sumerian words for animals, birds, fishes, terms for professions, types of personal names, geographical names ('gazetteers'), and all manner of objects – 199 such tablets have so far been found at Ebla. Among them are 32 (perhaps up to 56) *bilingual* vocabularies, having each Sumerian word translated into Eblaite (i.e., early Canaanite). One superb example (with 18 duplicate copies!) contains 1000 words in both languages – an inestimable treasure for scholars today, as it was handy for scribes in antiquity.[27] Aided also by the rest of the archives, these special tablets will enable us to see the early history of many hundreds of words familiar from biblical Hebrew and its relatives such as Ugaritic and Phoenician.

2.   *Earliest Literature of the Levant*

Hitherto, the world's oldest written literatures have been those of the two great river-valley civilisations – Egypt on the Nile, and the

Sumerians and Akkadians of Mesopotamia. Now, we have a third 'world's earliest' centre, at Ebla, offering literature in the oldest-known West Semitic language (Eblaite) as well as in Sumerian. The *mythological stories* show this blend well; written in Eblaite, they celebrate Sumerian deities such as Enki, Enlil, Utu, and the goddess Inanna.[28] The *collections of proverbs* will rival those of Sumer and Egypt as representatives of the world's oldest wisdom literature. In the religious realm come some brief *hymns* to the gods, and *magical incantations*.[29]

3. Religion[30]

Ebla was populated by gods (about 500!) as well as by over a quarter-million human inhabitants. Naturally, in so large a pantheon, it is the leading figures that really mattered. Linked with Canaan, Mesopotamia and Anatolia, cosmopolitan Ebla drew its chief gods from three regions at least. Most at home were the West-Semitic deities. These included: *Il* or *El*, the 'senior god'; *Dagan* (OT, Dagon), god of grain; *Rasap* (OT, Resheph), god of plague and lightning-flash; the sun-god *Sipish* (cf. Babylonian Shamash; OT *shemesh*, 'sun'): the weather/storm god *Adad*; *Ashtar*, a male equivalent of Astarte (OT, Ashtoreth); the goddess *Ashera* (cf. OT Asherah); *Kashalu*, perhaps the same as Koshar, the artificer-god of later Ugarit; *Malik* (cf. Ammonite Milcom?); and Kemish, perhaps familiar 15 centuries later as Kemosh, god of the Moabites. Distinguished foreign members of Ebla's pantheon included such venerable Sumerian deities as *Enlil*, lord of the world order, and *Enki*, god of magic and wisdom. Even more exotic were gods of the Hurrians ('Horites') from the north and north-east; such were Ashtabi, a warrior-god, and the goddess Adammu.[31] Local forms of the great gods were popular, e.g. Dagan of Tuttul, Dagan of Canaan, and so on. The Sumerian-Eblaite vocabulary tablets show us how the theologians of Ebla equated Syrian deities with their Mesopotamian cousins. Thus Resheph = Sumerian Nergal, and Sipish = Utu, for example.

The ancient gods of Ebla had to be housed, fed and honoured as befitted their station in life. The administrative tablets mention the temples of Dagan, Ashtar, Resheph and Kemish. The regular cult of the gods required bread and drink offerings, plus animal sacrifices, especially on festival days – such as on the feasts of Ashtabi and Adammu, for example. The royal family were patrons of the state gods. Thus, in one month, the king (*en*) of Ebla gave as offerings '11 sheep to Adad', '12 sheep for Dagan', '10 sheep for Resheph'. The literary texts preserve brief hymns sung to the gods, probably on such occasions. The actual temples of the golden age

of Ebla (*c.* 2300 BC) lie buried for the most part under later remains. However, the excavations have unearthed several temples of the later periods, *c.* 2200/2000 BC, and especially *c.* 2000/1650 BC.[32] The lower city boasted three in the south quarters (B1, B2, C) and one in the north districts (N). These sometimes had a large sanctuary within massive walls that once towered up to some height, with service-rooms around the outside. Most impressive of all was the great temple on the acropolis (site 'D'), with portico, vestibule and ample sanctuary, a distant forerunner in its layout of Late Bronze and Iron Age temples in Hazor and north Syria, and of the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. The furnishings of such a temple are illustrated by the fine stone libation-basin sculptured with scenes of the gods, doubtless used in the long, complex rituals of offering customary in all ancient Near-Eastern temples. From the tablets of *c.* 2300 BC, we learn also about the servants of the gods in such temples – priests, priestesses, and 'prophets'. For this latter group, two terms are used: *mahhu* (already known from later Akkadian), and *nabi'utum*, a word related to the Hebrew *nabi*, 'prophet'.

Naturally, the personal names of the people of Ebla often related to their gods, e.g. *Ebdu-Rasap*, 'servant of Resheph'; *Mi-ka-Il*, 'who is like El/God?' (cf. Hebrew *Mi-cha-el*). Some names end in the element *ya* or *a(w)*, as a seeming alternative to El. Prof Pettinato has questioned whether perhaps *El* and *Yaw* here alternate as names of god(s), somewhat as Elohim and YHWH in the Hebrew Bible.[33] If the form *Yaw* was actually an early form of YHWH, then of course the common misconception about Exodus 6:3, that the name YHWH was unkown before Moses, would be eliminated at a stroke, together with much of the 'critical' theories based in part upon such misconceptions. However, many West-Semitic names end in *-a* or *-ia*, a convenient abbreviation for the name of a deity (any deity) left unstated. Therefore, for the present, it is altogether more prudent to treat the *-ya* ending in Eblaite names as just such an abbreviation, rather than to base large assumptions upon it (however intriguing), until fuller and definite information becomes available.

EBLA AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Ebla in 2300 BC is indeed a fascinating place – but how does it relate to the Old Testament? At first blush (and admittedly with a mischievous twinkle in the eye), one might just reply, 'Not at all!' No biblical characters or events feature in the vast archives from Ebla, and Ebla itself occurs nowhere in the Old Testament.

However, the overwhelming importance of most Near-Eastern discoveries for the Old Testament consists in the enlightening *background* that they supply, rather than in specific mentions of biblical people and happenings. On that score, Ebla certainly deserves fullest consideration, even on the basis of the necessarily limited information so far available.

1. *On General Approaches*

Time and again in Old Testament studies, we are told that 'history knows of no such person' as, say, Abraham or Moses, or '... of no such events' as the battles of Genesis 14, for example. However such phrases are totally misleading. They simply cover the ignorance not of 'history' personified but of the person making this claim. Until 1975, Ebla was nothing more than a shadowy name: a once-prominent north-Syrian city alongside many more, such as Aleppo, Carchemish, Emar and the rest. If anyone *before* 1975 had stood up and dared proclaim that Ebla had been the centre of a vast economic empire, rival to that of Akkad, under a dynasty of six kings, he or she would have been dismissed with derision. History 'knew' of no such sweeping dominion, no such line of kings, no such preeminence. But since 1975, of course, the archives exhumed have changed all that!

Therefore, one lesson that Ebla reinforces is that it is always extremely foolish to argue from a negative, especially in view of our still very uneven and incomplete knowledge of the total history of the ancient Near East. Many gaps *are* closed – many others, in several regions, are not. As already mentioned, Akkad itself, the very capital of Sargon and Naram-Sin, has so far never been found in modern Iraq, even though its once-extensive remains must lie buried somewhere in that land. But this negative fact has never impelled any rational observer to doubt its former existence or importance. Therefore, it is entirely premature to dismiss on purely negative grounds the possible existence of biblical characters such as Abraham or Joseph, Moses or Solomon, for example.

A good example from outside the Bible is that of the Assyrian king Tudiya, already noted above for his treaty with Ebla. Until 1975, this shadowy name that heads the Assyrian King List (composed *c.* 1000 BC, in its first form) was treated with the greatest scepticism along with his near fellows – his name was even dismissed as 'free invention, or a corruption'![34] Whereas in fact, the name is real, the man is real, he was indeed Assyrian king as the List records, and as such signed a treaty with Ebrum king of Ebla. Thus, the genealogical tradition of the early part of the Assyrian King List (linked as it is with Hammurabi's ancestral line back

from *c.* 1650 BC) is to this extent vindicated as preserving faithfully the memory of real early people who were Assyrian rulers. Not dissimilar material in the Old Testament, therefore, such as genealogical material in Genesis 11 or patriarchal traditions, should be treated with similar respect.

2. *The Earliest Background for Biblical Hebrew*

To the orientalist, it is commonplace to handle from Egypt three thousand years of documents written in successive forms of ancient Egyptian; or from Mesopotamia, Sumerian and East-Semitic (Akkadian) documents covering practically the same long timespan. But until now, this has not been so for the family group of West-Semitic dialects to which biblical Hebrew belongs. Before 1929, practically no West-Semitic texts were known from much earlier than about 900 BC, except for the obscure proto-Sinaitic fragments, and some Canaanite words and forms in the Amarna tablets of the 14th century BC (in Babylonian cuneiform). But during the 1930's, the twin discoveries at Ugarit and Mari drastically enlarged our knowledge of West Semitic in the 2nd millennium BC. At Ugarit, those tablets written in a local cuneiform alphabet used also a local Northwest Semitic language – Ugaritic – quite closely related to both Hebrew and Canaanite/Phoenician. All these tablets were written in the 14th/13th centuries BC prior to the fall of Ugarit in *c.* 1200 BC, while some compositions originated rather earlier. At Mari, the enormous archives of some 22,000 tablets (even bigger than Ebla) of about the 18th century BC contained many personal names expressed in a form of West Semitic often labelled 'Amorite', an early cousin of Ugaritic and El-Amarna Canaanite. But now, Ebla has taken our knowledge of West Semitic nearly half a millennium further back, to *c.* 2400 BC, almost to the mid-third millennium BC. West Semitic in its various forms now at last has an ancient history of two-and-a-half thousand years comparable in outline with Egyptian and Akkadian. A highly simplified table may serve to illustrate its successive phases set out in parallel with those of Egyptian and Akkadian for comparison.

EGYPTIAN	DATE	WEST SEMITIC	AKKADIAN
Old Egyptian	Mid-3rd mill-nm BC	Eblaite, or 'Palaeo-Canaanite'	Old Akkadian
Middle and	Early-2nd mill-nm BC	'Amorite' (Mari)	Old-Babylonian & Old-Assyrian
Late Egyptian	Later-2nd mill-nm BC	Canaanite, Ugaritic	Middle Babylonian & Middle Assyrian
Late-Eg.; Demotic	1st mill-nm BC	Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic; Moabite, etc.	Standard & Neo-Bab.; Neo-Assyr.; Late-Babyl.

Seventy or a hundred years ago, no such vast depth of perspective was possible; and to suit the purely theoretical reconstructions of Old Testament books and history by German Old Testament scholars in particular, many words in Hebrew were labelled 'late' – 600 BC and later, in effect. By this simple means, mere philosophical prejudices could be given the outward appearance of a 'scientific' linguistic foundation. This kind of manipulation is still a basic element in such reconstructions down to the present day.

However, the immense growth in our knowledge of the earlier history of words found in Old Testament Hebrew tends now to alter all this. If a given word is used in Ebla in 2300 BC, and in Ugarit in 1300 BC, then it *cannot* by any stretch of the imagination be a 'late' word (600 BC!), or an 'Aramaism' at periods when standard Aramaic had not yet evolved. It becomes instead an *early* word, a part of the ancestral inheritance of biblical Hebrew. More positively, the increased number of contexts that one gains for rarer words can provide useful confirmation – or correction – of our understanding of their meaning. [35]

Thus, to go back to the survey of city-officials at Ebla, the term used for those scores of 'leaders' was *nase*, the same word as *nasi*, a term in biblical Hebrew used for leaders of the tribes of Israel (e.g., Numbers 1:16, 44, etc.), and applied to other purely human rulers such as Solomon (1 Kings 11:34). Old-fashioned biblical criticism declared the word to be 'late', a mark of the hypothetical 'priestly code' for example. [36] The word *ketem*, 'gold', is in Hebrew a rare and poetic synonym for *zahab*, and is commonly dismissed as 'late'. [37] Unfortunately for this mis-dating, the word was borrowed into Egyptian from Canaanite back in the 12th century BC, [38] and now – over 1000 years earlier still – recurs as *kutim* in the Palaeo-Canaanite of Ebla, 2300 BC. [39] The rare word *sāgā* (two forms), 'be/grow great', is similarly neither an Aramaism nor 'late', [40] but is firmly attested in Ebla (2300 BC) in the personal name Shiga-Damu, 'Damu is great'. [41] The short relative form *she*, *sha*, may well be 'northern', but hardly 'late', [42] as it now occurs (as *shi*) in Eblaite – northern but very early! [43] As remarked in Chapter 2, the Hebrew word *tehom*, 'deep', was not borrowed from Babylonian, seeing that it is attested not only in Ugaritic as *thmt* (13th century BC) but also at Ebla a thousand years earlier (*ti'amatum*). [44] The term is Common Semitic. As an example of a rare word confirmed in both existence and meaning, one may cite Hebrew *'ereshet*, 'desire', which occurs just once in the Bible, in Psalm 21:2 (Heb. 21:3). Besides being found in Ugaritic in the 13th century BC, [45] this word now appears a millennium earlier at Ebla as *irisatum* (Eblaite or Old-Akkadian) in the Sumerian/Eblaite

vocabulary tablets. [46] Finally, the supposed 'late' verb *hadash/hiddesh*, 'be new'/'to renew' goes back – again – via Ugaritic (*hadath*) to Eblaite *(h)edash(u)*. [47] And so on, for many more besides.

The lessons here are – or should be – clear. Set against $2\frac{1}{2}$ thousand years of the history and development of the West Semitic dialects, the whole position of the dating of the vocabulary and usages in biblical Hebrew will need to be completely reexamined. The truth appears to be that early West Semitic in the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC had in common a vast and rich vocabulary, to which the later dialects such as Canaanite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, etc., fell heirs – but in uneven measure. Words that remained in everyday prosaic use in one of these languages lingered on only in high-flown poetry or in traditional expressions in another of the group. Thus, not a few supposed 'late words' or 'Aramaisms' in Hebrew (especially in poetry) are nothing more than early West-Semitic words that have found less use in Hebrew but have stayed more alive in Aramaic. Conversely, supposed 'Hebraisms' in Aramaic are sometimes just words more alive in ordinary Hebrew, but inherited also in Aramaic as part of older, traditional usage. And, as illustrated above, the impact of this oldest West-Semitic language of Ebla – especially when allied with evidence from 'Amorite' and Ugaritic – promises to be drastic indeed upon the gross misuse of the 'late word argument' by Old Testament scholars intent on propping-up the long outdated 19th century reconstructions of Old Testament history and literature, based essentially on false philosophical presuppositions instead of upon verifiable facts.

3. *Lies, *** lies, and statistics!*

This saying is a child of our modern times, born of the welter of numbers that engulfs our lives, and of the uses and misuses to which they can be put. Numbers, however, can present great problems also in studying the ancient biblical Near East. Some – as today – represent the misuse of numbers, as when the court scribes of Sargon II of Assyria (c. 722–715 BC) deliberately inflated totals of booty claimed from one version of a text to another. Thus, 1235 sheep taken in one edition became 100,225 in a later one! [48] Other problems involved are quite different. In texts long transmitted by repeated recopying, the accurate transmission of numbers required particular care and was not always maintained. And sometimes the ancients provide us with first-hand statistics of indubitable authenticity that still surprise us.

Ebla illustrates this theme in several respects. Imperial Ebla at

the height of its power must have had a vast income. From one defeated king of Mari alone, a tribute of 11,000 lbs of silver and 880 lbs of gold was exacted on one occasion.[49] This *ten tons* of silver and over *one third of a ton* of gold was no mean haul in itself. Yet it was simply one 'delectable extra' so far as the treasury-accounts of Ebla were concerned. In such an economic context, the 666 talents (about twenty tons) of gold as Solomon's basic income from his entire 'empire' some 15 centuries later (1 Kings 10:14; 2 Chronicles 9:13) loses its air of exaggeration and begins to look quite prosaic as just part of a wider picture of the considerable (if transient) wealth of major kingdoms of the ancient biblical world.[50] Again, the vast city and acropolis of Ebla with an area probably ten times that of Solomon's Jerusalem enjoyed a comparably larger administration. Where Solomon in Jerusalem had 12 officers in Israel to provide the royal supplies (1 Kings 4:7), the kings of Ebla had had 103 'leaders' (*nase*) and 210 'aides' to look after services for the four palaces of their acropolis already described above, not to mention the staff of 4,700 people employed there.

The comparisons just given do *not* prove that Solomon actually did receive 666 talents of gold, or that his kingdom was organised just as Kings describes. But they do indicate clearly (i) that the Old Testament data must be studied in the context of their world and *not* in isolation, and (ii) that the *scale* of activity portrayed in the Old Testament writings is neither impossible nor even improbable when measured by the relevant external standards.

4. *Personal Names*

Not a few of the proper names of inhabitants of Ebla have struck Pettinato and others by their obvious resemblances to a wide range of personal names of individuals in the Bible. Among the kings of Ebla, Pettinato has singled out Ebrum or Ebrium as possessing the same name as Eber of Genesis 11:14–16, a distant ancestor of Abraham, and as a possible equivalent of the term *ibri*, 'Hebrew'[51] (cf. 'Abram the Hebrew', in Genesis 14:13). That Ebrum is the same name as Eber (omitting the old ending -*um*) is quite probable – but there is no reason to suppose that they are the same person. Even inside Ebla, one finds quite a number of people, all different but bearing the same name – the 'John Smiths' of their time.[52] The Ebla example of Ebr(um) merely shows how early and how authentic Eber is, as a *real* personal name, not just a legendary invention, back in the 3rd millennium BC – which is as much as one might expect. The link with *ibri* (if correct) is of little consequence, except (again) to demonstrate the probable antiquity of the term.

Perhaps of greater interest are such names as Ishmail ('Ishmael'), Ishrail ('Israel')[53] – borne by ordinary flesh-and-blood citizens of Ebla, *c.* 2300 BC, five centuries or more before either the Ishmael and Israel of the biblical patriarchs (son and grandson of Abraham) or the well-known Yasmakh-El of Mari (*c.* 1800 BC) and Yisrail of Ugarit (*c.* 1300 BC), also real flesh-and-blood individuals. The most important contributions of the Ebla occurrences of these and other such names[54] are (i) to emphasize once more that these are names used by *real* human individuals (never by gods, or exclusively (if ever) by tribes, or by fairytale figures), and (ii) to indicate the immense antiquity of names of this type, and of these names in particular. It should occasion no surprise to find other Ishmaels and Israels in antiquity besides the biblical characters that bear these names. Many parents today have their own personal or special reasons for giving particular names to children – but the names so chosen are usually already-existing ones, not strange new ones invented for the occasion. So, too, in antiquity. Among the city 'leaders' of Ebla discussed already, we find three men all called Bedunum (Recto, III, 4, 6, 15), all in one section; three men called Ennaia (or 'Hanania'; Recto, IV, 5, V, 6; Verso, VI, 4); four men called Tilaia (Recto, IV, 3, 12; Verso, III, 12, V, 7), besides several pairs of men with each the same name. This feature of popularity of names is, of course, well known from many other sources besides Ebla in antiquity.

5. *Places*

Not a few towns of biblical interest appear in the Ebla tablets, which preserve (in most cases) the earliest-known mention of these in written records. Well east of Ebla, on or near the Khabur river, Nahur is mentioned – a centre familiar from the Mari archives – which might also be the 'city of Nahor' (Genesis 24:10). Nahor was a relatively common name, found also for the grandfather and the brother of Abraham (Genesis 11:24–26). However, if the 'city of Nahor' is to be taken as a personal reference to one of these men, then it may simply by a synonym for Haran where Terah died.

More useful, potentially, are the Eblaite mentions of familiar Palestinian place-names such as Hazor, Megiddo, Jerusalem, Lachish, Dor, Gaza, Ashtarot (-Qarnaim), etc. Several of these places are known archaeologically to have been inhabited towns in the 3rd millennium BC (Early Bronze Age III–IV), and these tablets confirm their early importance, possibly as local city-states. Finally, Canaan itself now appears as a geographical entity from the later 3rd millennium BC, long before any other dated external

mention so far known to us – it will be interesting to learn what extent is accorded to Canaan in the Ebla texts.

6. *Religion*

Several of the West Semitic or 'Canaanite' gods familiar from the Old Testament and at Ugarit now have their histories extended some centuries back into the 3rd millennium BC – such include Dagan, El, Adad, Resheph, Ashera, Kemosh, etc.; as distinct from Adad, Baal has not been reported so far. As for the abodes of deity, the biggest temple at Ebla (acropolis, 'D', c. 1800 BC) shows a three-part plan that became one of the basic types of temple-plan in Syria-Palestine thenceforth. This comprised a portico, vestibule, and inner sanctuary or holy-of-holies. Over a millennium later, this scheme reappears in one of the temples at Hazor (area H) in the 13th century BC, as well as being reflected in Solomon's temple (as Matthiae has also noted[55]), besides other Syrian temples.

In matters like priests, cult and offerings the records from Ebla so far merely reinforce for Syria-Palestine what we already know for Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the 3rd, 2nd and 1st millennia BC, and from the records of North-Syrian Qatna and Ugarit for the 2nd millennium BC. Namely, that well-organized temple cults, sacrifices, full rituals, etc., were a *constant* feature of ancient Near-Eastern religious life at *all* periods from prehistory down to Graeco-Roman times. They have nothing to do with baseless theories of the 19th century AD, whereby such features of religious life can only be a mark of 'late sophistication', virtually forbidden to the Hebrews until after the Babylonian exile – alone of *all* the peoples of the ancient East. There is simply no rational basis for the quaint idea that the simple rites of Moses' tabernacle (cf. Leviticus) or of Solomon's temple, both well over 1000 years later than the rituals practised in half-a-dozen Eblaite temples, must be the idle invention of idealising writers as late as the 5th century BC

The occurrence of *nabi'utum* (cf. Hebrew *nabi*) as a class of 'prophet' alongside the better-known *mahhu*[56] will add another chapter – the earliest yet – to the 'prehistory' of prophecy. It is certainly the oldest attestation of the term; knowledge of the function of such men at Ebla must await publication of the tablets.[57] The Eblaite *mahhu* may have had similar functions to those known from Mari in the 18th century BC. These men indeed delivered the 'message' of Dagan or other gods to the king of Mari – but always briefly, and purely in the king's political or military interests, sometimes with promise or threat, depending on the king's response. Never, however, do they adopt the stance of a Nathan, an Amos or a Hosea, or an Isaiah, to reprove and admonish on

vital issues of personal morality, social justice, or obedience to God as man's due to him. Apart from the eloquent (but relatively 'secular') pleas for just conduct of affairs in Egyptian works such as the Eloquent Peasant or the Admonitions of Ipuwer, the moral and spiritual tone of the later Old Testament prophets remains without real parallel in the ancient world.

7. *In Conclusion*

From the foregoing, it should be evident that, in terms of background, Ebla has much to offer already to biblical studies, especially in relation to its early date, on West-Semitic languages, and a wide range of information on the most diverse topics. We may expect a very great deal more, when – eventually – the documents themselves are published in full and can be studied in depth.

4

Founding Fathers in Canaan and Egypt

Among the more memorable narratives in the Old Testament are those about Israel's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, culminating in the splendidly-told story of Joseph. In Genesis, these men are the recipients of promises for their descendants. Later in the Old Testament, from Moses onwards, it is in fulfilment of those promises that the Hebrews are brought out of Egypt, constituted a national community by covenant, and taken into Canaan. Thus, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the 'founding fathers' of ancient Israel, her natural ancestors going back beyond Moses and the Sinai covenant, in the biblical record.

A CENTURY OF CONTROVERSY – FOUNDERS OR FICTIONS?

During the later 19th century, rationalistic Old Testament scholarship in Germany decided that the Old Testament accounts of Hebrew history did not fit 'history' as it *'should'* have happened, according to their preconceived ideas. Therefore, its leading representatives rearranged the Old Testament writings (including imaginary divisions of these) until Old Testament history, religion and literature had been suitably manipulated to fit in with their philosophical preconceptions. Far and away the most accomplished advocate of this ultimately arbitrary method was Julius Wellhausen, brilliantly exemplified in his *Prolegomena to the*

History of Israel, first published in 1878 (in English, 1885), and in his article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* then.

According to these theories, the patriarchs were simply shadows, the vague stock of the 15th century BC (in 19th-century dating), from which sprang a few shepherds who made their way from south Palestine to Egypt and back again.[1] He claimed dogmatically that 'here [in Genesis] no historical knowledge about the patriarchs is to be gotten, but only about the period in which the stories about them arose among the Israelite people. This later period was simply to be projected back into hoary antiquity and reflected there like a glorified mirage.'[2] For Gunkel, the stories of the patriarchs were sagas or legends, in contrast to the history proper; the patriarchal figures he considered to be, not individual humans, but personified tribes and the like.[3]

From those distant days until now, therefore, German Old Testament scholarship has servilely adhered to the dogmas of Wellhausen and Gunkel, with minimal variation. This can be seen in Eissfeldt's words that the patriarchs 'have thus become representatives of the post-Mosaic people of Israel projected back into the pre-Mosaic age; what they do and endure ... reveals indirectly the circumstances of an Israel settled in Canaan.'[4] Even Wellhausen's 15th-century date is kept, by misapplying the Nuzi data.[5]

Outside Germany, however, such unbelievable devotion to old-fashioned critical dogmas was left far behind during the 1930's onwards. At that time, W. F. Albright of Baltimore pioneered a new school of thought that sought to correlate the narratives of Genesis with the growing mass of inscriptional and archaeological evidence from the ancient biblical world, in particular setting the patriarchs in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC.[6] The archives from Mari (18th century BC) and Nuzi (15th century BC) were drawn upon to illustrate wide travel, semi-nomadism and West-Semitic personal names, and legal/social usages respectively. The classic modern outline of this view is that of Bright in his well-known history of ancient Israel.[7]

However, this relatively sane and moderate view of the patriarchs has in recent decades been clouded by treatments of very questionable value. C. H. Gordon opted for a 14th-century date on too-limited grounds,[8] as well as (with others) a highly-coloured view of Abraham as a merchant-prince. Others again made of Abraham a warrior-hero. And latterly, Albright himself advocated a view of Abraham as a 'donkey-caravaneer', a travelling trader rather than a pastoralist.[9] Speiser meantime had opted for a largely Hurrian (Horite) interpretation of the activities of the patriarchs, using principally the Nuzi archives as his resource.[10]

The founding fathers began to look more like Hurrians than Hebrews!

The view initiated by Albright and elaborated in these very varied ways by him and others held the field up to the beginning of the 1970's. During the current decade, however, and especially since the death of Albright (1971), reaction has — not too surprisingly — set in. Encouraged by old-style 'diehards' in both Germany and America, a small group of younger scholars have written at length to 'debunk' the views of the Albright school concerning the patriarchal age — and in fact, any view other than the negative attitude to early Hebrew tradition in the later 19th century.[11] Far from being 'radical' scholars, such writers are in truth 'reactionaries' who seek, in essence, to put the clock back by 100 years. And their highest role in reality is simply that of 'devil's advocate'. Thus, their works *do* perform the useful function of ruthlessly exposing sloppy argumentation by others, false or inadequate parallels, refuting the wilder excrescences of speculation, and emphasising the need to look at all periods (not only the 2nd millennium) in reviewing possible background to the patriarchal narratives. All this is salutary, and all to the good, in clearing the ground towards a more firmly based assessment.

However, these same advocates themselves then fail to match up to this selfsame standard of reviewing the patriarchal data against *all* periods. Instead, they neglect the 3rd millennium BC entirely, along with whole sections of relevant evidence from the early 2nd millennium, and give exaggerated attention to 1st-millennium materials. In the process, they fail, therefore, to distinguish between features attested at *all* periods (hence useless for dating), features attested in some periods, and features attested in only one period (early or late). In order to prop up the old 19th-century view of the patriarchs as late fictions dreamt up 1000 years after the 'patriarchal age', they are driven to produce arguments at times so tortuous and convoluted as to stand almost self-condemned as spurious and far from even remotely proving their case. For example, van Seters artificially excludes all patriarchal personal names from consideration other than Abraham on the excuse that they are tribal,[12] while in point of fact all external correlations show them to be personal! He makes the incredible suggestion that the detail of the patriarchs living in tents 'is more suggestive of the first millennium than of the second.'[13] Quite the contrary is the case. In the 20th century BC, the Egyptian Sinuhe who fled home to live in south Syria speaks easily and naturally of living in a tent, and (after single combat) of stripping his enemy's tent and camp.[14] In the Admonitions of Ipuwer (17th century BC at latest),[15] 'tents it is that

are set up for them (displaced Egyptians) like the foreigners (do)'.[16] The foreigners envisaged would be Egypt's neighbours in Palestine. From the other end of the ancient Near East, the Sumerian 'Myth of the god Martu', eponym of the 'Amorites' of north Syria, dismisses the 'stereotype' Amorite in the words 'a tent-dweller [buffeted?] by wind and rain ... who in his lifetime does not have a house ...',[17] in a text of the early 2nd millennium BC. Later in the 2nd millennium, the Ugaritic epics mention tents (same word as Hebrew *'ohel*), as do Egyptian sources — the West-Semitic word recurs under Merenptah and Ramesses III (13th/12th centuries BC). And so on.[18] In other words, tents (not surprisingly) are to be expected at all periods and are useless for dating. And that camels as a *subordinate* item in the patriarchal narratives are anachronistic is flatly contradicted by the available evidence to the contrary.[19] Speculations by T. L. Thompson[20] in terms of 'Maccabean or post-Maccabean' (!) chronology imposed on the Hebrew text simply beggar belief as a species of cabbalistic gematria. Post-Maccabean is, in effect, the time of Herod and the Romans, the period of the Dead Sea Scrolls, when the text of such books as Genesis was already settled! And so one might continue the exposure of misconceptions, lop-sided presentations and downright special pleading.

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

From this welter of controversy, what — if anything — emerges? If we open the pages of Genesis, etc., what sort of patriarchs do we actually find? And of what use is the supposed ancient Near Eastern evidence? The answer to the first question depends on those to the latter two questions, to which we must briefly turn.

1. *The Patriarchs and Narratives themselves*

In Genesis 11:27 to 50:26, we have a series of narratives, punctuated by occasional genealogies and poems. An ordinary man, Terah, has three sons and a grandson in Ur. After the death of one son, the family moves off northwestwards to Har(r)an in Upper Mesopotamia, staying there until Terah's death. Leaving one branch of the family there, one son (Abraham) and his nephew travels west and south into Canaan, visiting Egypt briefly, then spending the rest of his days moving around Canaan, as a pastoralist,[21] and head of a growing clan of retainers.[22] Abraham desired offspring; his God gave him a covenant and promises. The adopted servant (Eliezer) and servant-girl's son (Ishmael) in due time made way for a true son (Isaac), whose marriage to a girl

from the Haran branch of the family was arranged before Abraham's death. External events hardly touch the essentially 'family' narrative – the defeat of four eastern kings and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (14;19) alone feature, because of Lot's involvement. Isaac (Genesis 26 ff.) followed quietly in his father's pastoral way of life, also growing occasional crops (Gen. 26:12, 14). Of his twin sons, Jacob took the lead, seeking refuge from Esau's wrath by living with the Haran branch of the family, marrying two of their girls. Later, he returned to Canaan and reconciliation soon before his father's death (Gen. 27–35). Then, in Gen. 37–50, we have essentially the story of Joseph (Jacob's eleventh son), magnificently told: a youngster sold into Egyptian bondage by jealous brothers, his godfearing integrity leading him to high position in Egypt, so that he is in due time enabled to sustain his family who come also to reside in the Egyptian east Delta.

Throughout these narratives, several features are apparent to any reader. They deal almost exclusively with *ordinary human beings*, men and women, who are born, marry, have children, tend sheep, goats, cattle, and grow a crop or two, who love, quarrel, die and are buried. They worship their God, building simple altars, and have dreams and visions. There is nothing here that is not within the range of known human experience. The narratives in Genesis are the *only* record available that mentions the patriarchs; like a myriad other private individuals in antiquity, they are not so far attested in any other ancient document. This has two consequences. First, this *is* our sole record – any attempt to amend it only substitutes guesswork (inherently of no authority) for the one definite record that we do have. Second, as this *is* the only record, a modern observer is initially free to take any of several conceivable views of the *nature* of these narratives. They could be pure fiction, precursor of the modern novel. They might be, quite in contrast, straight, factual narratives of historical people who actually lived precisely as described, from start to finish. Or, they might be something in between: e.g. narratives about people once real, about whom either (i) selected features were remembered or (ii) various stories clustered in the course of time. Various other possibilities have been canvassed.

Is there anything further in the narratives to guide us? At first sight, some might consider certain limited special features as giving a lead. First, the patriarchs speak with God and he with them. Second, the patriarchs tend to live rather long (Abraham: 175 years; Isaac: 180 years; Jacob: 147 years), even marrying later than many people do (e.g. Isaac marrying at 40; Gen. 25:20).

Third, other 'remarkable' points are few,[23] and in the Joseph narrative, nil; no 'miracles' disturb its even flow, for example. That real people can speak to deity – prayer! – proves nothing against their reality. Neither does deity speaking to man – as the Hebrew prophets later claimed, for example – witness Ramesses II at the Battle of Qadesh, who had Amun's reply to his prayer.[24] Thus, intercourse with deity has no bearing on historicity of the humans involved. Only very rarely are deity and humans shown confronted in these narratives: Hagar (Gen. 16:7–13), Abraham (Gen. 18–19), when humans appear as God's spokesmen, or a voice comes from heaven (Gen. 22:11, 15).[25] Likewise, concerning the long lifespans: far 'worse' than Abraham, Isaac or Jacob was Enmebaragisi king of Kish with 900 years' reign in the Sumerian King List – but who was indubitably historical nonetheless (cf. chapter 2 above). The transmission of numbers being a special issue on its own, these long spans have no direct bearing on the historicity or otherwise of the patriarchs.

2. Literary Background

In fact, one may go still further. We possess neither proof nor disproof, at first hand, of the historical existence of the patriarchs or of the narrations about them. But these same narratives can be compared with other ancient Near Eastern narrative works of several categories.[26]

In Egypt, we may distinguish between three categories of narratives (besides royal inscriptions and myths). *First*, 'autobiographies' and autobiographical narratives. The former are attested in the third, second and first millennia BC alike, from tombs, stelae and statues of officials. They are commonly expressed in the first person, often with an introduction in the third person; they are unquestionably historical.[27] Autobiographical narratives include Sinuhe (c. 1930 BC) and Wenamun (c. 1075 BC), known from papyri and recopied as literature. Wenamun is generally accepted as historical, and Sinuhe is most probably based on the tomb-text of a historical person. These too are in the first person, and share a vivid style with some of the autobiographies. Providential events do occur, and dealings with deity,[28] but no 'miracles'. *Second*, historical legends. In the second and first millennia, these are stories about known historical personalities – kings, princes, officials – but written at later periods, often long afterwards. Thus, the Tales of the Magicians (Papyrus Westcar), c. 1600 BC, tells of supposed magicians at the courts of known kings of a thousand years before; historical characters such as the sons of Kheops (builder of the Great Pyramid) appear. The acts of the

magicians are imaginary, and involve marvels: causing the severed heads and bodies of decapitated animals to rejoin spontaneously, etc.[29] *Third*, purely fictional stories. Such include adventures and fantasies like the Shipwrecked Sailor (*c.* 1800 BC) with a magic island, great talking serpent, etc.; or the Foredoomed Prince (thirteenth century BC) in which a king's only son (under three fates from angry fairy godmothers) seeks his fortune incognito in distant Syria, rescuing a princess from a tower, etc.; or the Tale of the Two Brothers (thirteenth century BC) with the younger brother transforming himself from human form into a bull, then into two persea trees, ultimately to reappear as the king's son. These usually [30] have no named heroes or personalities, and none but the vaguest locales in Egypt or abroad.[31]

In Syria-Palestine, despite much more limited material (so far), the situation is similar. *First*, 'autobiographies'.[32] The best known example is that of king Idrimi of Alalakh (early fifteenth century BC), telling of his life as a fugitive and how he regained his father's throne, all in the first person.[33] *Second*, quasi-historical legends. Here, the West-Semitic literary tablets from Ugarit (fourteenth/thirteenth centuries BC) offer us two works probably of this type. First and foremost is the Legend of King Keret, portrayed as ruler of a realm in the Habur region of Upper Mesopotamia who (after losing first wife and offspring) seeks a new wife with the god El's encouragement. By her, he raises a new brood, falls ill, and is cured by a winged emissary from El. The locations are probably real, and 'the assembly of Ditanu' probably links up with historical tradition in Mesopotamia.[34] Apart from El's ministering angel, there are no 'marvels'. However, the whole text is set in a distinctive epic style, high-flown poetry rich in standing clichés. It is clearly a legendary poetic epic whose chief character was quite possibly a historical king of centuries before. Secondly, there is the Legend of Danel and Aqhat. Danel is king of Harnam in the Lebanese Beqa-region who, also, needs and is granted a son, Aqhat. This text, however, in similar poetic epic style, is pure legend and mythology, as Danel, Aqhat and the various Canaanite gods mingle freely in the action. If there ever was such a king, his name, location and perhaps son are the sole conceivable 'historical' elements; the main thread of the epic lies elsewhere.[35] Danel in fact is closer to Egypt's third class of narrative – purely fictional tales – and is perhaps best so classified.

In Mesopotamia, we find largely comparable literary groups. *First*, as historical texts of kings preponderate, few 'non-royals' have left biographical-type narratives. However, at a period of relative weakness in Assyrian central government, the high official

Shamshi-ilu (eighth century BC) left monumental texts on his own account at Til Barsip, for example.[36] Two other officials show similar independence.[37] *Second*, historical legends. These occur in both the Sumerian and Akkadian literatures. In Sumerian (early second millennium BC), we possess a series of epic tales of early kings who lived in the early third millennium BC (nine hundred years earlier) – of Enmerkar and Lugalbanda (four works), and above all about Gilgamesh of Uruk (five separate legends). These three kings were all, originally, very early Sumerian city-state rulers whose fame became (literally!) legendary. Enmerkar and Lugalbanda are shown in negotiation and conflict with the distant land of Aratta (in Iran?). Gilgamesh fights with Agga king of Kish; goes on an expedition to the cedar-forests in the (Syrian) mountains; is involved with the goddess Inanna, etc. All these stories are set out in a high-flown, poetic style, and sometimes involve deities directly. In Akkadian (Babylonian) literature, the materials on Gilgamesh are woven into a single Epic of Gilgamesh, whose hero seeks immortal life after the loss of his friend. The great kings Sargon and Naram-Sin of Akkad (*c.* 2300 BC) were celebrated in legends of five hundred or more years later. These reflect in colourful form the imperial wars and battles of these known historical kings. In The King of Battle Legend, for example, Sargon marches to Anatolia to aid the merchants there, his route being encumbered by blocks of lapis-lazuli and gold as well as by forest and thorn-thickets![38] One of the five legends about Naram-Sin has demonic hordes invading his empire from the north-west.[39] The historical king of Assyria, Tukulti-Ninurta I (thirteenth century BC), was also commemorated by an epic composition, in this case composed in his reign.[40] *Third*, purely fictional tales, without historical content. Such are the Three Ox-Drivers of Adab and the Old Man and Young Girl (both Sumerian)[41] and the Poor Man of Nippur and At the Cleaner's (both Akkadian).[42] Specific detail of people and places is often minimal, and such stories are entertaining and generalized.

In Hittite Anatolia, further material is to be found. *First*, historical texts. These are almost all royal – the Deeds of Anittas from the dawn of Hittite history, the 'Annals' of Hattusil I, and the fuller records of the Empire kings. *Second*, historical legends. Here, the Hittites copied and translated Mesopotamian works about Gilgamesh and Sargon of Akkad, besides their own stories of (e.g.) King Anum-Khirbe and the City of Zalpa, and the Siege of Urshu. Here too, historical people and elements are set in later literary works. *Third*, stories of general, fictional type – stories of Appu, Keshshi and others.[43]

In summary, the ancient biblical world had a considerable (if un-evenly preserved) wealth of narratives varying from strictly historical/(auto)-biographical through historico-legendary (stories of former historical persons) to pure fiction, even fantasy. Where then, as West-Semitic narrations, do the patriarchal narratives stand in this wider literary context? First of all, as noted already, they are entirely concerned with a purely human family whose lifestyle is firmly tied to the everyday realities of herding livestock (pasture, wells), yearning for children, arranging suitable marriages, and so on. We never read (for example) of animals divided up that magically rejoin and live again, or of a patriarch's path barred by blocks of lapis or gold. Rather, bearing strictly real, human names, the patriarchs move in well-defined, specific loca-tions — Ur, Haran, Damascus, Shechem, Egypt, Shur, Hebron/Mamre, the Negeb, Gerar, etc. — and not in some vague, never-never land. By their names and characters, the patriarchs are a group of distinguishable individuals, neither ghosts nor stereo-types. Only two features seem other than purely mortal and 'secular', and neither is pertinent to deciding the question of historicity. As noticed above, long lifespans are no more contra-historical than the 900 years of an Enmebaragisi in Sumer. And the relations with deity are comparable in form with those attested of known historical people (e.g. Ramesses II), with the rarest excep-tions. Thus, even on a severely 'rationalistic' view, the scope for supposedly non-historical embellishments is very limited.

Secondly, therefore, on content and type, the patriarchal narratives of Genesis 11–50 can be seen to be wholly different from the third class of ancient Near-Eastern narratives, the vague fictions and fantasies of (e.g.) the Shipwrecked Sailor or the Tale of the Two Brothers. One need only read these and the Genesis narratives to see the striking differences. The latter, again, are also visibly different from the second class of ancient Near-Eastern narratives, the 'historical legends'. As remarked above, no 'animal magic' (cf. Tales of the Magicians), or gold and lapis outcrops or demonic hordes (Sargon, Naram-Sin.) And stylistically, the Genesis narratives are expressed in straightforward prose — not the stilted epic poetry of such as Keret and Danel at Ugarit. In both content and literary mould, the patriarchal narratives are visibly more 'realistic' and seemingly 'historical' than anything in most of the historical legends of the ancient Near East. How, then, do the patriarchal narratives compare with our first class of ancient Near-Eastern narratives (autobiographical, etc.)? The patriarchal narratives are neither royal inscriptions (formal texts for or by kings) nor autobiographical, first-person, accounts as

transmitted to us. But they do share the straightforward narrative form of known autobiographical works. They are in the third person and set in the past; Genesis (50:26) ends with Joseph put in a coffin in Egypt. On type, therefore, our extant patriarchal narra-tives come *between* the first and second classes of ancient Near-Eastern narrative. In sober content and mode of expression, they are clearly closest to the first category, without being identical with it (not first person). They share their third person narrative form with occasional texts of the first category [44] and all texts of the second group — but entirely lack the fantasy-embellishments of the second group.

Hence, purely on literary type and content — as measured against the self-existent criteria of the biblical world — the patriarchal narratives stand closest to historically-founded narratives, sharing with 'legendary' narratives almost nothing but their 'posthumous' form. This by itself does *not*, of course, prove that the patriarchs are, or were, historical people. But these facts (based on external, tangible comparison) do favour understanding the patriarchs as having been historical persons within historically-based traditions, and equally clearly go against any arbitrary-based assumption that they 'must' have been simply a myth or legend. [45] In the latter case, we would have been entitled to expect a different type of narrative, more clearly of categories two or three. If the patriarchal narratives are not historical or quasi-historical, then they must be specimens of a type of imaginitive, 'realistic-fiction' novel not otherwise known to have been invented until several millennia later, in fact approaching modern times. That, in itself, would be more than passing strange.

An entirely separate issue from all of the foregoing is that of date. If the patriarchs indeed existed historically, the entire biblical tradition is unanimous in placing them long before the monarchy, and well before Moses, whose God was the God of the long-dead 'fathers', Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and in fact some four cen-turies before the exodus on more than one statement. As any ex-odus from Egypt leading to settlement in Canaan must pre-date the fifth year of the pharaoh Merenptah, at *c.* 1220/1209 BC at the latest,[46] four centuries before the late thirteenth century BC gives the seventeenth century BC as the latest possible date (on explicit biblical data) for the patriarchs on entry to Egypt, and they may obviously go back rather earlier. A quite separate issue from this is that of the date of the narratives *about* the patriarchs. The 'minimalist' view promulgated late last century would be that — at most — vague traditions of distant founding fathers were much later woven into a whole cycle of 'patriarchal stories' during the Hebrew

monarchy (*c.* 1000–600 BC), stories that reflect only the late period
in which they were concocted. [47] However, this minimalist view is
subject to various difficulties, including: (i) it fails entirely to ac-
count for firm correlations between features in the patriarchal
narratives and relatively early phenomena (early second millen-
nium), (ii) it entails acceptance of a 'modern novel' view of the
narratives already seen to be almost incredible (cf. just above), (iii)
the narratives do *not* take the proper, ancient Near-Eastern legen-
dary forms that they should if the minimalist view were true.
Therefore, the late date and fictional nature of the narratives
favoured by this antiquated view do not fit the facts available today
– the date of the narratives should most probably be earlier, and
their nature be something stronger than fiction, nearer to historical.
If the patriarchs really had been early-second-millennium ancestors
of thirteenth-century Israel, then it is conceivable that traditions of
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their family-group were handed down
among the Hebrews in Egypt (in both oral and written forms). The
first formal one-document composition about them might have
been produced in the thirteenth century BC, or at the very latest by
the united monarchy (*c.* 1000 BC). In that case, the narratives
should preserve traces of early-second-millennium date plus
possibly traces of the time of final composition (thirteenth century
BC or later) and of any subsequent minor editing.

Before we turn to the question of possible correlations between
features of the patriarchal narratives and in the ancient Near East,
one other question must be considered – that of the *transmission* of
traditions across several centuries. Could traditions about the
patriarchs be reliably transmitted during, say, the 430 years from
Jacob and Joseph's time to Moses's day? Or even till later? In the
light of currently available knowledge, the answer in principle must
be 'yes'. Thus, the discoveries at Ebla (chapter 3, above) have
shown that the Assyrian King List of *c.* 1000 BC and after was per-
fectly correct in accurately retaining the name and the function of
Tudiya as its earliest-known king of Assyria, who reigned about
2300 BC. This is a case of reliable transmission across *thirteen cen-
turies and more* – three times as long as the four centuries of
Genesis-Exodus, and half as long again as the spurious figure of
eight centuries that worried T. L. Thompson. [48] The Assyrian King
List tradition belonged to a West-Semitic family (that of Shamshi-
Adad I), as do the patriarchal traditions; and its original form
spanned a period of five centuries (*c.* 2300–1800 BC). Moreover,
this early Assyrian tradition had a close relative and part-parallel:
the less well transmitted list of ancestors of the great-grandson of ·
Hammurabi of Babylon, which ultimately went back seven cen-

turies to Tudiya. Furthermore, not all the ancestors in the twin
lines of Shamshi-Adad and Hammurabi had actually been kings of
Assyria or Babylon, but had been nothing more than minor family
chiefs – in effect, private people. Thus, quite apart from any
theories about the Hebrew patriarchs, the phenomenon of several
centuries' transmission of family memory is securely attested in the
West Semitic world of the early second millennium BC.

Further north, in Anatolia, the Hittite archives of the four-
teenth/thirteenth centuries BC preserved copies of an 'Annalistic
Report' by a king Anittas of Kussara, who had supposedly reigned
in an epoch (nineteenth/eighteenth century BC) before the founding
of the Old-Hittite kingdom proper. The historical reality of Anittas
was subsequently proven by archaeological discovery of tablets of
his contemporaries naming him, and of a spear-head inscribed
'Palace of Anittas'. Even though the surviving copies are from
about five centuries later, the authenticity of Anittas's 'Report' has
been demonstrated on both linguistic and historical grounds: a case
of reliable transmission across that span. [49]

Returning to Syria and West-Semitic tradition, we may glance at
the King List of Ugarit. A ritual tablet from shortly before 1200 BC
once contained a list of up to thirty-six consecutive kings of Ugarit,
stretching back through over six centuries to the founder Yaqaru in
the nineteenth century BC – royal ancestors of one of the last kings
of Ugarit; another document may cite five protohistoric rulers back
to 2000 BC or more. [50] Thus, the princes of a quite modest-sized
city-state could retain records reaching back six, perhaps seven or
eight centuries, BC. The reality of Yaqaru at least is essentially
proven by his 'dynastic seal' – of a type from about the nineteenth
century BC – used by later kings of Ugarit.

Finally, in Egypt, not only royal, but also private family records
and memories could reach far back. Thus, a celebrated private law-
suit concluded about Year 20 of Ramesses II (*c.* 1270/1260 BC)
was fought for a century earlier by rival wings of one family, to
gain control over a tract of land originally given to their ancestor
Neshi some three hundred years before Ramesses II's time. [51] Only
in recent years has Neshi himself turned up as a proven historical
character, serving the pharaohs Kamose and Ahmose who expelled
the Hyksos from Egypt, thus demonstrating the reliability of that
family tradition. This family was of no great or exalted standing by
Ramesses II's day, but zealously guarded its own traditions and
knew how to consult official records to cite in law courts.

Thus, in all the principal cultural areas of the ancient biblical
world, it was possible for the ancients to transmit family or other
traditions across a span of several centuries; this is a matter of

observed fact, not merely of speculation, as the foregoing examples should indicate.

3. Cultural Backgrounds

An ancient tradition reliably transmitted across several centuries is all very well in principle. But what about practice? In the case of the patriarchs, how far is it true that the narratives indeed reflect early second millennium conditions? Or has recent reactionary scholarship really won the day? A brief review is in order.[52]

(i) *Proper Names* The position here is that practically all the patriarchal names find their best equivalents and analogues in the early second millennium BC. Some names, elements and forms are attested also in later centuries – and some from as early as the third millennium BC. A point of particular importance is that all are *human* names, names of individuals, in external sources as in Genesis – *not* simply names of tribes, deities or other entities. Both elements in the name Ab-ram, 'the father is exalted' or 'the exalted one is father' occur in the Mari archives[53] and other early second millennium sources, as well as in later centuries. Ab(u)-ram(a) should not be confused with Abi-ram, 'my father is exalted'. The extended form Ab-raham has its nearest relative in the name Abu-rahan of the Egyptian Execration Texts (c. 1800 BC), *n* and *m* being dialect-variants in some cases.[54] Ben-('son'-) names such as Benjamin are common at all periods. 'Amorite Imperfective' names such as Jacob, Joseph, Isaac, Ishmael, Israel, are particularly favoured in the early second millennium BC, go back to the third millennium BC, and are in use in the later second millennium BC, sometimes appearing later still. Thus, Ishmael is paralleled not only by Yasmakh-El, etc., in the Mari archives (eigthteenth century BC) but five hundred years earlier at Ebla, as Ishmail. Likewise, Israel is paralleled not only by the thirteenth century Yisra-il of Ugarit but also by the twenty-third century Ishrail of Ebla. Parallels for Jacob are particularly well-known in the early to mid-second millennium.[55] Zebulon is close to Old-Babylonian Zabilanu and the Zabilu-Hadda of the Execration Texts, while Levi compares with equally early second millennium names in Lawi-; and so on.[56] As virtually the whole body of 'patriarchal' names has parallels from the early second millennium BC (sometimes even from the third), it is impossible to use later occurrences of some names or elements to prove a late date. The names indicate a date either in or after the early second millennium.

(ii) *Social and Legal Usages* Various of the social customs of the patriarchs find no echo in the days of the Hebrew monarchy, and practically none in the laws of Moses (Exodus-Deuteronomy).

But they do find analogy in the law-collections and usages of early second millennium Mesopotamia. These make it clear that the rights of children by more than one wife were to be safeguarded. Just as Jacob kept both Leah (whom he had not desired) and Rachel (whom he did), without divorcing the former, so in the Lipit-Ishtar laws (twentieth century BC), § 28, a man was to maintain his first as well as second wife.[57] Again, the children of more than one wife, including by slave-girls if acknowledged, all had rights of inheritance, as is clear from Lipit-Ishtar, § 24, and from Hammurabi's laws (eighteenth century BC), § 170. This too is admitted by Jacob, as all of his sons – by the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah, as well as by Leah and Rachel – are included in his final blessing (Gen. 49); this usage did continue into at least the late second millennium, being recognised in Deuteronomy 21:15–17. Across the centuries, one may see a shift in emphasis in some details. Thus, in the twentieth century BC, Lipit-Ishtar's laws envisage (§ 24) equal shares among all the inheriting children. In the eighteenth century BC, Hammurabi's laws (§ 170) qualify this by giving a 'first choice' in the estate to the son(s) of the first wife. In the fifteenth century BC, various Nuzi adoption-tablets clearly accord a double share to a first-born natural son (in contrast to an adoptee).[58] In the thirteenth century BC, a double share is also the prerogative of the firstborn son in Deuteronomy 21:15–17. Several centuries later, in the sixth century BC, the Neo-Babylonian laws go a stage further, assigning two-thirds (i.e. double share) of the inheritance to the sons (plural; not solely the first-born) of the first wife, and one-third to the sons of the second wife.[59] As Jacob in Gen. 49 bestowed blessings upon all his sons, he stands closest to the oldest legal tradition here, not the latest.

However, the sons of wives of different status did not always fare analogously. The Lipit-Ishtar laws (§ 26) reserved the main inheritance to the children of a deceased first wife, excluding sons by a subsequent lesser (slave?) wife (separate provision). One may here compare Gen. 25:1–6, in which (correspondingly) Abraham 'gave all that he had to Isaac' his main heir, while giving parting gifts to lesser sons by the (lesser) wife Keturah and concubines.[60] In Hammurabi's laws, sons of slave-wives shared inheritance if acknowledged by their father (§ 170) but not if unacknowledged (§ 171). In this context, it is interesting to observe Abraham's evident desire to 'recognise' Ishmael (Gen. 17:18), and reluctance to dismiss Hagar and Ishmael from the family (Gen. 21:10–11). However, God's plan was for an heir (Isaac) by Abraham and Sarah, not Ishmael for whom a separate destiny was intended. Normally, if a slave-wife had borne children, she was not to be ex-

pelled or sold (so, Hammurabi's laws, § 146), thus Abraham's un-willingness to do so (Gen. 21:10–11) was reinforced by binding custom of the day; divine urging was needful to persuade him to send Hagar and Ishmael away (Gen. 21:12–14).[61]

Before he had children at all, Abraham had adopted Eliezer, a 'son of his house' (cf. Gen. 15:3, RV) as his heir. Possibly a slave,[62] probably simply a member of the household, the inheritance-rights of such an adoptee were commonly guarded in Mesopotamian law, even against the subsequent birth of offspring (natural heirs) to the adoptor.[63] Such a position was explicitly accepted by Abraham (Gen. 15:2, 3), until he was told and commanded otherwise (Gen. 15:4).

The whole of the foregoing sample of comparative legal material gives some indication of how simply and straightforwardly the data of the patriarchal narratives go along with evidence for prevailing usage in the first half of the second millennium BC, especially the early part. It will be noticed that Nuzi has hardly been drawn upon – and when cited (in the notes) it essentially goes with the other Mesopotamian evidence. Three lessons are to be learnt here. First, patriarchal usage finds ample early context, well before, and independently of, Nuzi. Second, usages at Nuzi often belong to the mainstream Mesopotamian tradition. Third, the thesis of a specially Hurrian component in the legal/social usages at Nuzi largely evaporates – and has no bearing on the patriarchs either. Here, as in other things, the Hurrians largely assimilated to Mesopotamian modes and culture; Nuzi is nearer the end of a development than the beginning.

In contrast to the foregoing survey of 'positive' context, it is well to note cases of alleged parallels that have not stood the test of time, particularly from Nuzi. One such is the supposed Nuzi parallels for Abraham calling his wife his 'sister' (Gen. 12:10–20; 20:2 ff.; cf. Isaac, 26:6–11) which are totally irrelevant.[64] The supposed role of the *teraphim* or 'household gods' (Gen. 31:19, 30–35) as constituting the title-deeds to inheritance, inspired by Nuzi documents, seems also to be fallacious;[65] Rachel simply took them for her own protection and blessing. Again, much has been made of supposed sale of birthright, and of oral deathbed blessings, and here too the Nuzi evidence is not what it was thought to be.[66]

Then there is the question of special pleading and misuse of data, whether of first or second millennium BC. Thus, thrice over, van Seters has tried to correlate a seventh-century Assyrian marriage-conveyance with Sarah's giving of Hagar to Abraham to have a son (Gen. 16:1 ff.), as well as an Egyptian text of the twelfth century BC.[67] The Egyptian text can be dismissed without further ado;

it consists solely of a remarkable series of adoptions (of a wife by a husband, of a brother by a sister, etc.), in which only one element is comparable with Sarah/Hagar – as direct background to Gen. 16 its value is virtually nil.[68] The Assyrian text is hardly in much better case. Van Seters overstresses the initiative of Sarah (Gen. 16:2), whereas it is Abraham to whom the matter of a son and heir is central concern (Gen. 15:2–6; 16:5; 17:2–6,16–17; 22). The Assyrian document contains the parallel of a servant-girl bearing sons in the childless wife's stead, but has no word about future inheritance, etc. Furthermore, it stipulates that the slave-girl may be sold off at will, in direct contrast to the position in Genesis (21:10–11) where – in harmony with most early second-millennium usage – Abraham did *not* expect to dispose of Hagar (whether by sale or simple expulsion). Hence, the Assyrian document is an inferior parallel to the second millennium data. And, as its latest editor makes clear,[69] this selfsame document is *not* a normative Neo-Assyrian marriage-contract, it is by its conditions 'without any parallel', 'out of the ordinary' for its epoch. Hence, this very imperfect, anomalous 'parallel' hardly links Genesis to the first millennium.

In the case of Genesis 23, two issues must be viewed separately. A question that remains open is the possible use of the Hittite Laws as background to that chapter. This would suggest that Abraham sought to buy only the Machpelah cave (carrying no land-dues), but – under the necessity of burying Sarah – had in fact to buy the entire holding inclusive of the cave (which meant paying also the dues).[70] Already, § 46 of the Hittite Laws has been rightly excluded, as it deals with gift, not sale.[71] However, the relation of § 47 (utilised above) turns on the status of Ephron (unknown!) and the meaning of particular terms in the laws.

But a question that can be considered closed is the attempted misuse of a class of first millennium documents to prove a late date for Gen. 23. These are so-called 'dialogue-documents' of Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times, asserted to be the 'model' for Gen. 23.[72] However, there is not a scrap of evidence that Gen. 23 *is* a 'dialogue-document' – it is merely a narrative of negotiations and agreement; and the assertion that 'dialogue-documents' were only of the first millennium BC rested solely on negative evidence, notoriously unreliable.[73] And in fact erroneous, as this type of document *is* attested from the Old-Babylonian period, i.e. the early second millennium BC![74] At a stroke, the special pleading by Tucker and van Seters for a first millennium date must be dismissed. The type of document alleged is as likely to be early as late, and may not even be relevant.

(iii) *Patriarchal Religion* It remains true that by far the most

cogent parallels and background for the concept of 'the God of the
fathers' go back to the Old-Assyrian tablets of the nineteenth cen-
tury BC, clearly superior to Nabatean and Safaitic part-parallels so
late (virtually New Testament times!) as to have no bearing on the
Genesis narratives.[75]

(iv) *Geopolitical* In Genesis 14 occur rival coalitions of kings
from Mesopotamia and Transjordan. Petty kingdoms flourished in
Canaan and Transjordan at most periods. By the thirteenth cen-
tury BC onwards, city-states (Sodom, Gomorrah, etc.) were
replaced by larger kingdoms in Transjordan (Moab, Edom; Sihon's
realm, etc.). Hence, reports of city-state coalitions there must relate
to the thirteenth century BC or earlier. But with coalitions of
Mesopotamian and neighbouring kingdoms, the scope for dating
seems to be still more limited. Between about 2000 BC (fall of the
Third Dynasty of Ur) and roughly 1750 BC (triumph of Ham-
murabi of Babylon), such power-alliances were an outstanding
feature of the politics of the day, reaching as far east as Elam, and
far north-west to the borders of Anatolia. One famous Mari letter
mentions alliances of ten, fifteen and even twenty kings. At least
five other Mesopotamian-based coalitions are known from the
nineteenth/eighteenth centuries BC, usually with four or five mem-
bers per grouping.[76] Western expeditions by eastern kings are
known from at least Sargon of Akkad onwards.[77] The
phenomenon of Mesopotamian coalitions in the form found would
not fit a date before 2000 BC (when the Third Dynasty of Ur
dominated), and certainly not after Hammurabi's time (*c.* 1750 BC),
when the twin kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria in due course
became the *only* heartland Mesopotamian powers. Therefore, even
though it is impractical to identify (and thus date) the individual
kings of Gen. 14, the political framework in which they move is
that of the early second millennium BC. Attempts to assign a late,
still more a very late, date to Gen. 14 fail entirely to account for
this situation. The comparison with late Mesopotamian
chronicles[78] is spurious. The third-person narrative and brief
speeches in Gen. 14 are no different to those elsewhere in Genesis;
the subject-matter does not justify a 'chronicle' classification. With
the rarest exceptions, the first-millennium Mesopotamian chroni-
cles are altogether more stilted and staccato than Gen. 14, com-
monly with frequent regnal dates and month notations. In Gen.
14, we have no regnal dates, merely a period of twelve/fourteen
years independent of any given reign. Just as it is no chronicle, so
Gen. 14 is not a royal inscription, but it has more in common with
the flowing narrative of a text like the early second millennium
'foundation-text' of Iahdun-Lim, King of Mari,[79] describing his

Syrian campaign, etc., than with any late chronicle.

(v) *Other Aspects* The preceding sections are in no way ex-
haustive; more could be said in each, and other topics added. The
semi-settled status of the patriarchs, etc., is most easily comparable
with the early second millennium data from Mari, when this is
properly understood. The wide travel of the patriarchs is par-
ticularly in harmony with what we find in the early second millen-
nium. The Canaan in which they circulate is a Canaan of petty, in-
dependent city-states and tribal groups — not one dominated by
(e.g.) the Egyptian Empire, as was the case during *c.* 1540–1150
BC. Their Canaan is much more that of the Execration Texts of the
nineteenth/eighteenth centuries BC. And so on.

So what, then do we end up with? Perhaps the following would
be a fair summary. First, we have no external mentions of the
patriarchs themselves beyond the pages of the Bible. Therefore,
their historical existence remains unproven. In this, they stand on
exactly the same level as (e.g.) Jezebel, Jeremiah, Zedekiah or Ezra
— none of whom is named by name in any external, contemporary
document, yet whose former existence is doubted by none. And so
for many other characters of ancient history, high and low, famed
or obscure. Negative evidence does not take one anywhere.
Second, the patriarchs are figures of Israel's beginnings, from well
before Moses, on the unanimous verdict of biblical tradition in its
entirety. So, any real traditions surviving about the patriarchs
should have their roots in the early second millennium, unless they
have been totally changed; spurious 'traditions' first concocted in
the first millennium BC cannot be expected to relate to second
millennium conditions. Third, the actual narratives that we possess
are clearly different from the 'legend' and 'fiction' groups of ancient
Near-Eastern narratives. They are closest to the 'historical' class,
differing from it only in past time-setting and third-person (which
features *can* occur in that class); 'wonders' have remarkably little
role. Thus, on literary-comparative grounds alone, essential
historicity should be granted. Fourth, comparisons between the
features of the narratives and external data show that the recent at-
tempts to link the patriarchal narratives exclusively or predominan-
tly with the mid-first millennium BC are artificial and mistaken.
Some features are common to the second and first millennia, others
more specifically belong to the early second millennium, and nearly
all find their *optimum* place in the early second millennium, even
when not exclusively.

ISRAEL INTO EGYPT: JOSEPH

Essentially, the Joseph-narrative is today in the same position as the rest of the patriarchal narratives. It is a straightforward account, without artificial flourishes. Some elements in the story suggest an early/mid second millennium origin. [81] Such features include the price paid for Joseph as a slave (20 shekels), the correct average price in the eighteenth century BC, and the use of the term *saris* in its earlier meaning of 'official', not its later meaning of 'eunuch', when applied to the (married) dignitary Potiphar. [82] Other features are not specifically tied to the earlier second millennium, but are well attested then. Asiatic slaves in Egypt, attached to the households of officials, are well-known in later Middle-Kingdom Egypt (c. 1850–1700 BC), [83] and Semites could rise to high position (even the throne, before the Hyksos period), [84] as did the chancellor Hur. Joseph's career would fall easily enough into the period of the late thirteenth and early fifteenth dynasties. The role of dreams is, of course, well-known at all periods. From Egypt, we have a dream-reader's textbook in a copy of c. 1300 BC, originating some centuries earlier; such works are known in first-millennium Assyria also. [85]

'Corn in Egypt' is a proverbial phrase, even in English. And as well as vivid tomb-paintings with fields of golden grain, Egyptian texts speak frequently of famine, and occasionally show its emaciated victims. The Delta was a favoured region for pasturing cattle, and the east Delta a favoured objective for herdsmen such as Joseph's family. Through becoming steward of a large Egyptian household (Gen. 39:4–6), and then as a chief official of pharaonic government (Gen. 41:39–45), anyone placed in Joseph's situation would willy-nilly be brought into close contact with writing and records. In about this period, the Middle Bronze Age, alphabetic writing seems first to have been invented. There is, therefore, the attractive (but totally unproven) possibility of patriarchal traditions being put into such script, in West-Semitic, from the seventeenth/sixteenth centuries BC onwards, as the basis of what later we now find in Genesis.

5

Birth of a Nation

When the biblical narrative reopens in the book of Exodus, we are in a changed world from that in which the book of Genesis closed. Long since dead, Joseph and his brothers are forgotten by all but their own descendants. New pharaohs reign, and one arises for whom Semitic pastoralists in the east Delta are simply a convenient supply of additional forced labour. The change implies a distinct lapse of time and change of regimes, as notable people were not always so quickly forgotten. [1] Thus, the tradition of four centuries gone by (cf. Exodus 12:40–41) should be taken seriously. These are often dismissed as the four silent centuries, which is only partly true. Negatively, their details evidently did not serve the purposes of the writer of Exodus, and he therefore exercised an author's right – then as now – to select what *he* deemed best for his requirements. Positively, from the period between entering Egypt (Jacob) and settling in Canaan (Joshua and the judges), the Hebrews did in fact retain some traditions, from which various genealogies survive, preserved for us in 1 Chronicles 2 of the post-exilic age. [2]

OPPRESSION AND EXODUS

In Imperial Egypt of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC, the enormous building-projects of the pharaohs throughout Egypt and Nubia required the deployment of a considerable amount of manpower. For houses, offices, storerooms, barracks, and palaces,

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Abraham in History and Tradition

Part II: Abraham the Prince

Donald J. Wiseman

In the previous article in this series it was suggested that Abraham's designation as "the Hebrew" marked him not as a semi-nomad, but as a resident-alien (גר) newly arrived in the land, who took active and public steps to take possession of land granted him by divine covenant-promise.[1] He was in effect taking over "by faith" the area known later as Judah.[2]

ABRAHAM AS A POLITICAL LEADER

This leads to a study of his ascription as "Abraham the prince" (Gen. 23:5, AV) or the נשיא, a title given by a group of foreigners living among the Canaanites who also held land rights in the same region *de facto*.[3] This was after Abraham had lived in the area for sixty-two years (cf. Gen. 12:4; 17:17; 23:1) when the "sons of Heth" (Hittites) under Ephron who owned the field and cave of Macpelah in a district of Canaan treated Abraham with respect as the head of a clan residing as their neighbors.

"We look on you as a mighty leader (נשיא אלהים) among us" (Gen. 23:6), they said, and there is no hint that Abraham's dealings with them were unexpected, insincere, or contrary to accepted local

1 Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham the Hebrew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (January—March 1977):123-30.
2 With the defeat of the coalition of kings near Damascus, Abraham would be regarded as succeeding them "as far as Dan" (Gen. 14:14), thus taking over the rest of the Promised Land.
3 Cf. Genesis 25:16 and Numbers. The title was later extended to the chief representatives of the Israelite tribes in state and religious groupings (Gen. 17:20; Num. 1:16; 1 Kings 8:1).

custom. Whether this phrase is taken as a superlative[4] or as an acknowledgement of his affiliation to God ("a נשיא of God") by men of another religion,[5] the use of the term נשיא clearly denotes a position of dignity and leadership.[6] It is similarly used in early texts of the chiefs of the Midianites (Josh. 13:21; Num. 25:18) and Shechem (Gen. 34:2), which, with Edom, were all tribes involved in the promise made to Abraham (17:4-8). The title is later applied to David[7] and Solomon (1 Kings 11:34) as to the chief political authority, comparable to the later "king" (מלך) (Exod. 22:28).

Moreover, the suggestion that the term may well include the idea of official selection by the people[8] would be appropriate in a situation where ten named ethnic groups all lay claim to adjacent territory in the same area as that promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21).[9] Such groups would normally make local alliances for defence as did Abraham during the time of the raid on Sodom by a covenant-association with Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner specified as part of the local "Amorites" (14:13, 21).[10] By such an agreement the parties rendered themselves liable to provide forces to assist an injured colleague.[11] That Abraham was the acknowledged leader on this occasion may also be shown by reference to them as dependent on Abraham's division of the spoil (14:24), and to him is attributed both the reception of the intelligence information and the military leadership in which his initiative and stratagem culminated in a surprise night attack resulting in complete victory.[12] He was

4 D. W. Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," *Vetus Testamentum* 3 (1953):210-19.
5 H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1942), p. 644.
6 E. A. Speiser, "Background and Function of the Biblical *Nāsī*," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963):111-19.
7 In applying the title to Edom (Ezek. 32:29) Ezekiel's preference may not necessarily be, as commonly suggested, because the kingship of Israel and Judah was insignificant (34:34) but rather may be a reversal to the earlier tradition of the title applied to persons in a subordinate position under a great king.
8 Speiser, "Background and Function of the Biblical *Nāsī*," p. 115.
9 The "River of Egypt" is not the Wadi al Arish but is a wadi located nearer Gaza. The use of "rivers" to mark boundaries was common (cf. Josh. 1:4; Judges 4:13; 1 Kings 4:21).
10 M. Liverani, "The Amorites" in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 124.
11 D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958), p. 41, lines 162-68.
12 A. Malamat, "Conquest of Canaan: Israelite Conduct of War according to the Biblical Tradition," in *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book 1975/6* (1977), p. 180.

acknowledged as leader of the group both by the king of Salem and by the king of Sodom and such leadership may not have resulted solely from his affinity to Lot whose cause he was espousing.

It was, however, not only those living within the bounds of the land promised to Abraham by the covenant land-grant who reacted to Abraham as the leader of the group occupying defined territory. Abraham is portrayed as the head of a substantial family group who had acquired possessions and dependents before entering Canaan (Gen. 12:5). He was a person of independent means, well able to provide for his family (cf. 24:22). His wealth was increased by gifts given by the king of Egypt (12:16, 20) so that he could be called "a very rich man" (13:2). The Hebrew כבד here also denotes the honor and respect due to a man of high position, thus demonstrating that he was not simply a poor wanderer.

ABRAHAM'S STATUS BEFORE PHARAOH

Difficult though the episode in Egypt may be to interpret, Abraham was still held in awe by the royal household there even after the so-called "deception of an innocent pharaoh" was known (Gen. 12:10-20). A major Egyptian ruler would have dismissed an insignificant foreigner without recompense. This accords with the evidence of the attitude of other external rulers to him, and it may be questioned whether this really was the "low moral point" in his life or that the story was invented to show the "climax of God's intervention and deliverance in the face of Abraham's failure which thus accounts for its popularity."[13] The act of going to Egypt for corn to save life is not of itself classed as a sign of lack of faith.[14] It would appear to have been a deliberate and regular practice of Abraham while abroad to refer to Sarai as his "sister" (Gen. 12:14) and this could be related to his description of Lot, his nephew (11:34), as his "brother" (אחיו; 14:14; cf. 13:8), which in the context could be "ally" — a person in association with Abraham on a covenant basis[15] who had been given, in effect, a preferential

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13 *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* s.v. "Abraham," by L. Hicks, 1:17.
14 Cf. Genesis 42:1; Egypt was commonly a place of escape from famine or opposition in Palestine (1 Kings 11:40; Matt. 2:13).
15 Genesis 29:12 is probably to be interpreted in a similar way rather than as "person of the same class" or status. Thomas L. Thompson, in *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974, p. 298), argues that the phrase in Genesis 14:4 is probably a priestly addition to make the story fit the "priestly" view of the relationship of Abraham and Lot. If this were so, a more exact kinship term would be expected (cf. Frances I. Andersen, "Israelite Kinship Terminology and Social Structure," *Bible Translator* 20 (1969): 29-39.

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choice in the inheritance of the land as if he were a true eldest son (13:9-11, 15). Similarly, the use of "sister" for Sarai might have been intended to denote a special covenant relationship, as if she had independent rights and responsibilities which might be expected to be exercised in revenge if the life of the allied party was at risk, though being a woman, and a beauty, Abraham was well aware whose life was most at risk (12:11-14)! It is also possible that Abraham could have called Sarai his (half-)sister legally (20:12) on the parallel of the marriage of Abraham's brother Nahor to Milcah the daughter of Harran, another of his brothers (11:29).[16]

Any supposed parallel with Hurrian wife-sister marriages[17] is to be rejected.[18] Also any relationship with the ancient Egyptian practice of royal weddings between brother and sister is unlikely since this was confined to the Egyptians and there is no evidence here that a marriage between a king of Egypt and the sister of a suppliant ruler from south Palestine relates to any treaty arrangement.[19] However, in view of the strong later tradition that Sarai was faithful to both her husband and his God (Isa. 51:2)[20] it may be questioned whether this episode is yet adequately interpreted.[21] For the present purpose it is sufficient to note that Abraham's status in the eyes of a powerful foreign king was such that he had to be adequately compensated and not simply expelled. Both Sarai and Abraham (Gen. 12:17) rightly rejected any association with Egypt.

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16 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis,* The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964), pp. 78-79. It is also noteworthy that Abraham's son married the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nahor (Gen. 24:15), the difference in generation being accounted for by the advanced age of Abraham and Sarah at Isaac's birth. Such meticulous description would be unexpected if the composition of this chapter were as late as some suppose.
17 E. A. Speiser, "The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives," in *Biblical and Other Studies,* Studies and Texts, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Altmann (Waltham, MA: Advanced Judaic Studies, Brandeis University, 1963), pp. 15-28 (esp. p. 25).
18 C. J. Mullo-Weir, "The Alleged Hurrian Wife-Sister Motif in Genesis," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 22 (1967-68), p. 23; and Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives,* pp. 233-34. Cf. S. Greengus, "Sisterhood Adoption at Nuzi and the 'Wife-Sister' in Genesis," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975):5-31.
19 This was always between members of the same Egyptian royal family. Also treaty marriages involve the daughter of one party.
20 Cf. also Hebrews 11:11 and 1 Peter 3:6.
21 If taken as an example of a sin of Abraham this would be further evidence of an early rather than a late source for the tradition. In the latter it would have been explained in such a way as not to impugn the character of Abraham as a man of courage.

ABRAHAM'S STATUS BEFORE ABIMELECH

There is evidence too that another foreign ruler, Abimelech, king of Gerar "in the land of the Philistines," was prepared to deal with Abraham as one of equal status and to enter with him into a covenant-treaty which included provision of territorial rights (Gen. 20:15). It is more likely that this was conceived as an inter-state relationship rather than an inter-individual relationship since, when the terms were considered to have been broken by Abimelech's unwitting action over Sarah, the divine curses which guarded such agreements were thought to fall not merely on Abimelech as an individual but on his city-state (20:7, 9) and the penalties to be paid publicly are duly prescribed (20:16).[22] The solemn agreement made by Abimelech and his army commander with Abraham bears the hallmarks of an ancient parity treaty which included provisions whereby the parties had to keep each other informed of transgression of border or well rights (21:26-27). Once again Abimelech's fear of Abraham is brought out by the clauses prohibiting the latter's interference with his dynasty or his kingdom which he must have envisaged as in Abraham's power to do (21:22-23). This may be further evidence of Abraham being already thought of as representing a group of "state-equivalents." It is unlikely that Abraham is here treated as of "vassal" status and he would therefore have demanded at least equivalent terms.[23] The treaty-covenant, customarily envisaged as enduring for the forseeable future,[24] remained in force at least until its ratification in the time of Isaac (26:28-29) and possibly until the time of Samson (Judg. 13:1).

Exception has been taken by some to the mention of "Philistines" in the patriarchal period (Gen. 21:32, 34; 26:1, 8, 14-18). These references are classed as anachronisms since, it is argued, these sea-peoples did not settle in southwest Palestine until ca. 1200 B.C. when they resided in a pentapolis led by lords (סרנים).[25] However, it should be noted that contacts between the Aegean sea-

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22 The omission of the weight in "a thousand pieces [shekels] of silver" (Gen. 20:16) was common in sources earlier than the late Middle Babylonian period, as was the qualification "of the merchants" (Bab. *sa damqarim*) of Genesis 23:16.
23 E.g., D. J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets* (London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1953), No. 2.
24 Further study is needed on the time-duration envisaged by all covenant-transactions. Note the "forever" in divine covenants (Gen. 3:22, Adam; 13:15, Abraham; Deut. 11:1, Moses; 2 Sam. 7:13, David; etc.).
25 John van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 52.

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peoples and Palestine in the Middle Bronze Age are attested. Crete (Kaptar, Heb. כפתור), which was their place of origin or transit, is mentioned in Egyptian and Mari texts of the early second millennium,[26] and Middle Minoan II pottery is found at Hazor, Ugarit, and in Egypt. Further, the Philistines are usually noted in Egyptian texts ca. 1200 B.C., together with other sea-peoples (Kreti = Cherethites) and the Genesis references could well be to "Philistines" used in a confederate sense.[27] It is by no means unlikely that in the prevailing situation of mixed ethnic groups some Philistines should settle south of Gaza around Gerar and be under a "king" and thus have been there already long enough to bear a mixture of Semitic (Abi-melek, Ahuzzat) and non-Semitic (Phicol, possibly Anatolian) personal names[28] and to conclude treaties according to formulae and procedures long attested throughout the ancient Near East.[29]

ABRAHAM AS A GOVERNOR

The status of Abraham can be examined further, for it may not be without significance that Abraham as a leader (נשיא) undertook the responsibilities normally associated with the ruler of a small state or with that of a provincial governor appointed by a great king. The role of the latter in the second millennium B.C. is reasonably well known from the Mari correspondence.[30] His title *šāpiṭum* (Heb. שפט) denotes "the one who governs" on behalf of the supreme ruler who has given him the office. Such a person was customarily addressed as "lord," being a superior person of dignity (as Abraham was addressed by the Hittites, Gen. 23:6, 11, 15) who worked through a chief steward who had wide administrative powers (as did Abraham through Eliezer, Gen. 15:2). The office and title of *šāpiṭum* occurs in the Ebla texts ca. 2300 B.C.[31] and appears to be the form perpetuated in Palestine in the time of the regional "governors" (a better translation than "judges," Judg. 2:16-18). The latter, like Abraham, were held to be sub-governors

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26 K. A. Kitchen, "The Philistines," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 56-57.
27 T. C. Mitchell, "Philistia," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 406-13. A similar situation arises with references to early Ahlamu-Ar(a)maya-Arameans.
28 Kitchen, "The Philistines," p. 72, footnote 24.
29 Compare the treaty between Ebrum of Ebla with Duddiya of Assur ca. 2300 B.C
30 A. Marzal, "The Provincial Governor at Mari: His Title and Appointment," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30 (1971):186-217.
31 Giovanni Pettinato to Donald J. Wiseman, July 8, 1976.

acknowledging the Lord God as "the supreme Governor of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25; cf. Judg. 11:27). The extent of the governorship varies according to local requirements and conditions, though it was always geographically defined.[32] In exercising their responsibilities some governors worked through local chiefs (abu bītim = "father of the house" [clan]), who could administer territories in the name of the local king or deity.[33] Provincial governors were usually granted lands by the overlord for their maintenance in lieu of salary. This may have significance for understanding the full purpose of the divine land-grant made to Abraham and his successors.

The responsibilities and duties of the governors differed little from those of the local city-state rulers, who were occasionally employed in a similar role.[34] These included the following:

MAINTAINING ORDER

Using limited local forces, including mercenaries, the governor had to maintain law and order within his designated area. Similar action is reflected in Abraham's action with the men of Bethel and Ai (Gen. 13:7), and at Beersheba in the border dispute with Gerar (21:25). As at Mari he also had to deal with cases of involuntary deportation. Abraham's employment of his 318 חניכים together with men supplied by his allies to recover Lot (14:14, 24) falls within this category.[35]

EXERCISING JUSTICE

The governor as "judge" would act on behalf of the great king in local decisions, especially matters of land disputes (cf. Gen. 13:7). As judge he would sit alone or in the gate with the local elders (cf. 23:10). This role is clearly seen in the express responsibility laid on Abraham to order his family and "clan-group" to follow him in "keeping the way of the LORD" by "exercising justice and law" (18:19). Righteousness (צדקה) and judgment (משפט) mark both the ideal (divine) role of God as the supreme Ruler as also it should those to whom He gives such responsibilities as His subgovernors. They themselves will be judged according to their fulfillment of the revealed divine standard. Here "the way of the

32 J. R. Kupper, "Un gouvernement provincal dans le royaume de Mari," Revue d'Assyriologie 41 (1947):161.
33 A. Marzal, "The Provincial Governor at Mari," p. 213.
34 Ibid., p. 202 (piqittum).
35 The "trained retainers" (Gen. 14:14) were probably of Egyptian origin. If so, this would also illustrate the use of "mercenaries" for guard duties as attested in texts of all periods.

LORD" (18:19, a rare singular; cf. Judg. 2:22; 2 Kings 21:22; Prov. 10:29; Isa. 40:3; Ezek. 18:29) may stand for the unified concept of law later indicated by Torah. The implementation of righteousness calls for its application in every aspect of life, individually and collectively in both legal, economic, and religious affairs which were considered indivisible.[36] The emphasis here is on the administration of the law including customary law (משפט). The maintenance of justice, distinguishing between right and wrong, was an aspect of governorship as it is of every man's life which is continually being assessed by God.[37]

COLLECTING TAXES AND TRIBUTE

The collection of dues and the forwarding of them to a higher authority was a time-consuming work for any governor. This included any payments made to the local cult-center whose maintenance was also his concern. There he would be present when an oath before the god was taken when a new official was appointed or a local covenant or agreement was ratified. Both these aspects may be seen in the incident of Melchizedek. If the words, "he gave him a tithe of everything" (Gen. 14:20), are interpreted as Abraham giving a tenth of the spoil to the priest-king of Salem in recognition of the identity of El Elyon with Yahweh (as traditionally interpreted according to Heb. 7:4, 10), it requires that emphasis be placed on Abraham dedicating something that was not his alone. Otherwise, it would seem to contradict Genesis 14:22-24. Elsewhere references to Melchizedek refer to the eternal nature of his royal priesthood.[38] Also the tenth (מעשר) is often, but not invariably, used of a sacred payment[39] and compared with the מכס used of a levy on war spoils (Num. 31:28).[40] It is unlikely, though grammatically possible, that Genesis 14:20 could refer to the king of Salem giving Abraham a tithe as to his acknowledged superior. It is to be noted that in Babylonian texts the tithe (eširtu, ešrētu) is used of a levy

36 D. J. Wiseman, "Law and Order in Old Testament Times," Vox Evangelica 8 (1973):5-21.
37 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
38 Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:10-21.
39 J. A. Emerton, "The Riddle of Genesis XIV," Vetus Testamentum 21 (1971): 407; E. Salonen, "Uber den Aehnten im alten Mesopotamien," Studia Orientalia 43 (1974):3-65.
40 Cf. the Akkadian miksu ("transit-tax") usually exacted by provinces and primarily from merchants (J. N. Postgate, Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974], p. 134).

paid on goods in transit (*miksu*) (and by the later first millennium it was used of a tax on field produce, which cannot apply here).[41]

Genesis 14 has been the subject of much discussion, with the Melchizedek incident (14:18-20) regarded as secondary and interrupting the narrative.[42] Subjective analysis of the literary style has resulted in varying attributions and dating of the sources.[43] Yet to conclude as some do that "consideration of Genesis 14 has generally been given up as historical"[44] or that the chapter "appears as an erratic block and is more a hindrance than a help to the historian"[45] is to overlook the inadequacies of any attempt to blend the so-called "heroic" elements with "historiographic" passages.[46] For the present it needs to be stressed that Genesis 14 does not demand a symbolic interpretation whereby Abraham is shown as confronting "a world empire."[47] Abraham is described in terms which accord with the early second millennium and do not fit in with our present knowledge of the later periods as sometimes proposed for the chapter. For example, the Genesis 14 incident would hardly have been meaningful or feasible after 1000 B.C. and certainly not after the reformation of the provincial system in Syria and southward carried out by Tiglath-pileser III in 740-734 B.C.[48] It is possible that the role of Melchizedek was primarily that of mediator between Abraham and the king of Sodom at a ceremony concerning the settlement and division of the spoils, the bread and wine being symbols commemorating the conclusion of treaty-covenants.[49] Abraham publicly declared that he would not take anything of the spoils for himself but assured the recovery of Lot's possessions (cf. 14:16) and the share of the spoils for Abraham's allies, with the women and children returned to Sodom as requested.

41 *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, s.v. "eširtu," 4:365.
42 Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, pp. 121-22; J. A. Emerton, "Some False Clues in the Study of Genesis XIV," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971):24-47; cf. p. 412.
43 From an early historical source to P,JE, or D to a late Jewish Midrash (Emerton, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, pp. 407-25).
44 Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, p. 186.
45 Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1972), p. 117.
46 Emerton, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, pp. 431-32.
47 M. C. Astour, "Political and Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis 14 and Its Babylonian Sources," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 65-112; but for an opposing view see Emerton, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, pp. 38-46.
48 Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1966), p. 45; H. W. F. Saggs, "The Nimrud Letters 1952; Part II: Relations with the West," *Iraq* 17 (1955):150.
49 D. Wiseman, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," p. 39, lines 153-54.

ACQUIRING INFORMATION

The governor was also involved through agents in commercial activity, and such may be reflected in a few of the indications from which it was once argued that Abraham was a merchant-prince.[50] In this activity a governor would acquire knowledge of activities in bordering territories, especially of events which might effect internal security. He had to keep his superior power informed of these, as of the passage of foreigners and messengers through his area. It was on this basis that Abraham intervened on behalf of oppressed loyal ("righteous") subjects. In his plea before the great "Governor of all lands" (Gen. 18:22-33) Abraham is likewise concerned not only with the impending action to be taken against Sodom (which is justified on the grounds of rebellion against the great King and the justice He requires) but also with the fate of the members of his own family-group for which he was responsible.

PROVIDING HOSPITALITY

In furthering his responsibilities as a whole, a governor had to provide accommodations for (and to welcome the escorts of) his visiting king, foreigners of note, and any important dignitaries who might pass through his territory.[51] This lies behind Abraham's entertainment of the three men at his principal base at Mamre (18:1-21). The aged patriarch treated his visitors with the respect due to those he would recognize as his superiors ("my lord," Gen. 18:3, 27, 30-31), especially to their leader. He provided the two messengers with information, an escort, and probably provisions when he "went with them to set them on their way" (18:16).

SUMMARY

This outline study has sought to suggest that Abraham, while ruling his own family and house, acted as a princely ruler and leader exercising the equivalent functions of a respected governor owing allegiance in all matters to the great King. In this he stands in direct succession to the kingly role of Adam and as a true predecessor to Moses and David. There is nothing inconsistent in the Abrahamic narratives which demands, as some would suggest, that this is a late interpretation of the patriarch's role.

50 Cyrus H. Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 17 (1958):28-31; but for an opposing view see H. W. F. Saggs, "Ur of the Chaldees," *Iraq* 22 (1960):200.
51 M. Birot, *Lettres de Yaqqim-Addu, gouverneur de Sagaratum*, Archives Royales de Mari XIV (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1974), nos. 19, 31, 97-120.

54 Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 133.
55 For a brief discussion of the use of tents, see John P. Brown, "Peace Symbolism in Ancient Military Vocabulary," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971): 20-23. J. Hoftijzer presents the view that it represents forcible dispossession of someone as, for example, in 1 Chronicles 5:10; Job 11:14; 18:15; and Psalm 78:55 ("Some Remarks to the Table of Noah's Drunkenness," *Old Testament Studies* 12 [1958]: 22-27).
56 Figart correctly affirms that "there is not one archaeologist, anthropologist, or Biblical scholar who has ever associated the Canaanites with Negroid stock. Canaan is listed in Genesis 10:15-19 as the father of eleven tribes, all Caucasoid with no Negro characteristics" (*A Biblical Perspective on the Race Problem*, p. 55).
57 Neiman, "The Date and Circumstances of the Cursing of Canaan," p. 126.
58 Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 63.
59 Herman Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902), p. 70.
60 Neiman, "The Date and Circumstances of the Cursing of Canaan," p. 131.

Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology

Eugene H. Merrill

It has often been observed that chronology is the skeleton of history, the temporal framework to which historical narrative is attached and from which it draws much of its relational meaning.[1] This is no less true of biblical history. The order of events (internal context) and their relationship to their times (external context)[2] have much to contribute to both a historical and a theological understanding of Scripture.

This study is limited to a consideration of the datable events of the Book of Genesis with the aim of demonstrating that there is not only a self-consistent chronological pattern in the book but that the narratives embedded within this pattern can take on new and deeper meaning when read in its light. Whether Abraham was living or dead at the time of Jacob's birth, for example, can influence the meaning and purpose of the story to some extent. And whether he is alive or dead can sometimes be known only by careful attention to comparative chronology.

The Basis of Old Testament Chronology

Following Thiele's revolutionary work, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*,[3] a consensus has emerged that the kingdom under Solomon divided at his death in 931 B.C.[4] This date must be the starting point for any chronological reconstruction of previous events. Happily there are data which make possible a reliable and convincing chronological structure as far back as Abraham and perhaps even earlier.[5] These begin with the note

in 1 Kings 6:1 that Solomon undertook construction of the Temple in the fourth year of his reign which also happened to be 480 years after the Exodus. This places the Exodus in 1446 B.C.[6] There is, moreover, the statement in Exodus 12:40 that Israel was in Egypt 430 years, thus yielding the date of 1876 for Jacob's migration there from Canaan.[7] Since Jacob was 130 years old at the time (Gen. 47:9), he was born in 2006. His father Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born (25:26), so Isaac himself was born in 2066. Abraham, in turn, was 100 years old at Isaac's birth (21:5); so he was born in 2166.

The above dates are based on the assumption that Thiele's chronological study of the kingdom period is valid and that the figures of the Masoretic text are accurate and are to be taken at face value.[8] If neither of these assumptions is correct, then, of course, nothing more can be said on the matter. But since both have been subjected to the most searching criticism and have remained unscathed except on purely unscientific and subjective grounds, it is methodologically proper to use them as points of departure.

Abraham

Regardless of one's position concerning "open" or "closed" genealogies, it is clear that Abraham was the son of Terah. What is not so clear is the fact that he was not the oldest son, despite the fact that he is named first in the list of Terah's sons (Gen. 11:26-27). Genesis 11:26 states that "Terah lived seventy years and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran." Verse 32 indicates that Terah died at the age of 205 years. This would appear to make Abram 135 years old at the time. Stephen, in his rehearsal of Israelite history,[9] makes apparent, however, the fact that Abram left Haran after Terah's death there and Genesis 12:4 observes that this departure occurred when Abram was 75. The implication of all this is that Abram was born about 75 years before his father's death or when Terah was at least 130 years old. Terah was born, then, at about 2296 B.C. Problems attendant to the interpretation of the genealogies preclude any certain restoration prior to Terah.[10]

Genesis 11:26-27 takes on a certain meaning in the light of these chronological facts which might not otherwise be apparent. Abram is mentioned first in the lists not because he was the eldest, but because he has historical and theological importance.

The same might be (and likely is) true of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, for in this case Ham was actually the youngest.[11] One must guard against assuming a chronologically sequential order in such instances for the controlling principle might be theological, climactic, or something else.

Abram was seventy-five when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4). He arrived in Canaan, therefore, in 2091 B.C. After ten years in Canaan (16:3) he married Hagar (2081 B.C.) and within a year Ishmael was born to them (16:16). This is confirmed by the fact that Abram was then eighty-six years old (2166-86 = 2080 B.C.).

The next debatable event is the confirmation of the covenant to Abram when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen. 17:1, 2067 B.C.). This means that Ishmael was thirteen years old and that Abram had waited more than a decade for the true seed to be given. Finally, Isaac was born on the following year (2066 B.C.) when Abraham was one hundred (21:2, 5) and Ishmael was fourteen.

In the meantime, between the time of the promise concerning Isaac and that of his birth, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Gen. 17:1; cf. 18:10; 21:2). This must have occurred in 2067-66 B.C.[12]

Genesis 24 relates the plan to secure a wife for Isaac and implies that Abraham acted alone in bringing it about. Sarah had died (23:1-2) and there was a need for a matriarch in the family. Abraham was about 140 when he sent the servant to Nahor to fetch a wife (24:1; cf. 25:20). This is evident since Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah. The date of the mission to Nahor, then, is 2026 B.C. Since Sarah was 10 years younger than Abraham (17:17) and she died at the age of 127 (23:1), the date of her death must be 2029. This results from the fact that she would have been 130 in the year 2026 (10 years younger than Abraham's 140 years), but died at age 127 or in 2029. These observations are helpful in explaining why Abraham only then was apparently eager to get a wife for Isaac when the latter was already over 40 years old and also why "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (24:67).

Jacob and Esau

Jacob and Esau were born in Isaac's sixtieth year or in 2006 B.C. (Gen. 25:26). Isaac and Rebekah were twenty years without children, sufficient cause for Isaac to entreat the Lord for his wife

(25:21). Abraham was still living, however; he did not die until the age of 175 in the year 1991 (25:7). His own experience of waiting on the Lord for the promised covenant son must have enabled him to provide encouragement to Isaac and Rebekah through this long period of childlessness.

THE DATE OF JACOB'S MARRIAGES

The statement that Esau was forty years old (so in 1966 B.C.) when he married the Hittite maidens Judith and Basemath (Gen. 26:34) introduces the most complex part of patriarchal chronology. The pattern developed at the beginning of this paper requires the date 1876 for Jacob's migration to Egypt with his extended family of children and grandchildren (46:6-7; cf. 47:9). This leaves ninety years between the date of Esau's marriage and the descent to Egypt. Such a period of time is sufficient for the marriages of Jacob, the birth of his sons, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, if Jacob's marriages occurred shortly after Esau's. The major problem with the ninety-year period is that Joseph, who was born no more than seven years after Jacob's marriages (30:23, 25; cf. 31:41), was only thirty years old at the time he was appointed overseer of Egypt's harvests (41:46). This was apparently at the beginning of the seven-year period of abundant harvest (41:46-47). Seven years later when the famine began Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for grain (42:1-2), and two years after that (45:11) he migrated to Egypt with his entire family (the year being, as stated earlier, 1876 B.C.). Since Joseph was thirty years old about nine years earlier, his birthdate must then be set at 1916-15 B.C. Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel could then be no earlier than 1923 or forty-three years after those of Esau and when Jacob was eighty-three years old.[13] This reduces the period between Jacob's marriages and his descent to Egypt to forty-seven years, a length of time which appears inadequate for several reasons.

JACOB'S MIGRATION TO HARAN

It seems plausible and best to date Jacob's migration to Haran in 1930 B.C., at which time he was seventy-six years old. After working for Laban seven years for the hand of Rachel, he married Leah and then Rachel in quick succession (Gen. 29:23, 28). This would have been in 1923. The fourteen-year period during which he worked for the wives ended in 1916 (29:30), so the total twenty years with Laban ended in 1910. Since, it ap-

pears, Joseph was born just before the six-year period of wages, his birth date should be in 1916 as well. And Jacob's covenant with Laban would also fall on that date (31:44).

JACOB'S SOJOURN AT SHECHEM

At this point another chronological crux (though not usually noted) occurs. The problem centers on the period of time between Jacob's departure from Haran and Joseph's being sold into Egyptian slavery at age seventeen (37:2). If Joseph were born in 1916 B.C. as proposed in this article, he was sold in 1899, thirteen years before he was promoted by Pharoah. During that time Jacob encountered Esau (Gen. 32-33) and sojourned at Shechem (Gen. 34) and Mamre (Gen. 35). The key chronological datum here is the rape of Dinah at Shechem and the vengeance of Simeon and. Levi against the Shechemites. Apparently after Joseph's birth to Rachel, Dinah was born to Leah (30:21).[14] Evidently she became of marriageable age while Jacob was still living at Shechem, which suggests that Jacob's stay there was of a longer duration than might otherwise appear from a superficial reading of the story. If Joseph were born in 1916, Dinah, at the earliest, was born in 1915. Five years later Jacob moved to Shechem, so Dinah was then only five years old. Even granting a possible early age for puberty and marriage at thirteen,[15] Dinah was not eligible for marriage until eight years had passed in Shechem, or in 1902. Moreover, for her brothers Simeon and Levi, who were not likely more than seven or eight years older than she was, to be able to avenge her humiliation in such a powerful and seasoned manner presupposes their having reached full manhood of twenty or twenty-one years, an age they did not achieve before 1902.

Jacob's arrival at Mamre, then, was probably no earlier than 1902-1900 B.C. In support of all this is the statement that when Joseph was seventeen (ca. 1899 B.C.) his father sent him to Shechem to report on his brothers who had gone there from Mamre to find suitable pasturage. This implies that Jacob's associations with Shechem were still close, a fact which would be unlikely if he had been gone from there for any length of time.

Judah

JUDAH'S MARRIAGE

Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah (29:35), could not have been born earlier than 1918 B.C. if the suggested date of 1923

for Jacob's marriage is correct. If Judah were only two years older than Joseph, as seems likely, his marriage to Shuah probably did not take place until ten or eleven years after the return to Canaan, for he was then only eight years old. And yet it could not have been much later since he must become, in effect, a grandfather by 1876. A rather good case can be made for his marriage having been undertaken following the settlement at Shechem, though not necessarily after the selling of Joseph. Genesis 38:1 states that "at the time . . . Judah went down from his brethren . . . to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah." This declaration makes more sense if Judah's point of origin was Mamre instead of Shechem because topographically the town of Adullam is "down" from Mamre but at the same elevation as Shechem.[16] Judah's marriage is probably to be dated in the period 1902-1900, the latter being preferable since he was even then only eighteen years of age. Too, the date 1900 fits in better with Joseph's being sold, an act perhaps precipitated by Judah's defection from the Lord and from his family.[17]

JUDAH'S FAMILY

Judah's two sons Er and Onan, who both married Tamar, could also have married as young as eighteen years, their marriages occurring no earlier than 1882 B.C. But when they were slain by the Lord and Tamar was asked by Judah to wait until his third son, Shelah, was grown so that she might marry him, one is getting very close to the descent-to-Egypt date of 1876. Assuming that Shelah was ready for marriage within five years (his failure actually to marry Tamar being irrelevant), such a marriage could not have antedated 1877.[18] The sons subsequently born of the illegitimate relationship of Judah and Tamar, namely Perez and Zerah, could also be no earlier than 1877. And yet in 1876 Jacob went to Egypt with Judah, Perez, and Hezron, son of Perez! How could Perez, no doubt scarcely having been born by then, have begotten a son who went with him to Egypt?

The most satisfying solution is that many, if not most, of the grandsons and great-grandsons of Jacob accompanied him only in potentiality. That is, they were "in the loins" of Jacob and his sons when the migration took place though they were not actually born until after the arrival in Egypt.[19] The narrative of Judah and Tamar demands a birth in Canaan for Perez, but such a birth need not have occurred much earlier than 1876 B.C. Judah, who was no more than two years older than Joseph, would have been

forty-two in 1876 and could easily have been the (grand)father of Perez that late.

Joseph

Meanwhile, through this whole long period, Isaac remained alive at Mamre. Finally he died in 1886 B.C. at the age of 180 (Gen. 35:28-29). Perhaps it is not more than an interesting coincidence that he died about the year his illustrious grandson, Joseph, was released from prison and elevated to a top position in Egypt.

Joseph, as stated earlier, was taken to Egypt in 1899 B.C. Since he evidently began his employment with Potiphar immediately, he must have remained there for perhaps eleven years. This is based on the fact that Joseph was advanced by Pharaoh after having been in prison for at least two years (Gen. 41:1). As argued elsewhere the period of plenty would be 1886-79 and that of famine 1879-72. Then thirteen years later (1859) Jacob died at the age of 147 (47:28), seventeen years after having moved to Egypt. Finally, the last datable event in Genesis is the death of Joseph at the age of 110 (50:22), which occurred in 1806.

Conclusion

A study of the chronology of the Genesis patriarchs is not a matter of idle curiosity or of playing a numbers game. Rather, a careful analysis of the data reveals the following facts: (1) Despite the claims of source-critics and tradition-critics that the patriarchal stories are only so many pieces in a patchwork quilt of originally independent and unrelated sagas, these incidents hang on a unifying chronological framework. This framework is so remarkably self-consistent that even the possibility of an alleged redactor who could so cleverly weave it all together must be rejected. (2) The relationships between the principal figures and events of the stories are greatly clarified when set in their proper chronological parameters. It helps, for example, to know that Abraham was alive throughout the twenty-year period of Rebekah's barrenness to give her and Isaac constant assurance of God's faithfulness. (3) Certain perplexing passages can be better interpreted once the guidelines of chronology are applied.

The insistence by some that the Bible is unreliable in certain areas, such as history, can be challenged at least in patriarchal chronology as this study has sought to demonstrate.

TABLE 1

PATRIARCHAL CHRONOLOGICAL DATA

DATE	EVENT	REFERENCE
2296	Birth of Terah	Gen. 11:24
2166	Birth of Abram	Gen. 11:27
2091	Abram's departure from Haran	Gen. 12:4
2081	Abram's marriage to Hagar	Gen. 16:3
2080	Birth of Ishmael	Gen. 16:16
2067	Reaffirmation of covenant	Gen. 17:1
2067-66	Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	Gen. 19:24
2066	Birth of Isaac	Gen. 21:2; cf. 21:5
2029	Death of Sarah	Gen. 23:2
2026	Marriage of Isaac	Gen. 25:20
2006	Birth of Jacob and Esau	Gen. 25:26
1991	Death of Abraham	Gen. 25:7
1966	Marriage of Esau	Gen. 26:34
1943	Death of Ishmael	Gen. 25:17
1930	Jacob's journey to Haran	Gen. 28:2
1923	Jacob's marriages	Gen. 29:23, 28
1918	Birth of Judah	Gen. 29:35
1916	End of Jacob's fourteen-year labor for his wives	Gen. 29:30
1916	Birth of Joseph	Gen. 30:23
1910	End of Jacob's stay with Laban	Gen. 31:41
1910	Jacob's arrival at Shechem	Gen. 33:18
1902	Rape of Dinah	Gen. 34:1-2
1900	Marriage of Judah	Gen. 38:1-2
1899	Selling of Joseph	Gen. 37:2
1888	Joseph imprisoned	Gen. 39:20; cf. 41:1
1886	Joseph released	Gen. 41:1, 46
1886	Death of Isaac	Gen. 35:28
1879	Beginning of famine	Gen. 41:54
1878	Brothers' first visit to Egypt	Gen. 42:1-2
1877	Judah's incest with Tamar	Gen. 38:18
1877	Brothers' second visit to Egypt	Gen. 43:1; 45:6, 11
1876	Jacob's descent to Egypt	Gen. 46:6; cf. 47:9
1859	Death of Jacob	Gen. 47:28
1806	Death of Joseph	Gen. 50:22

Notes

1 See, for example, H. H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua* (London: British Academy, 1970).

2 The intention of this paper is not to identify the larger, external ancient Near Eastern milieu of which the patriarchal world is a part. This has been done by many others and the overwhelmingly convincing conclusion to the reader who takes both ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament evidences at face value is that the patriarchs were real people who lived and moved in the early second millennium B.C. For support of this see George E. Mendenhall, "Biblical History in Transition," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. G. Ernest Wright (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965), pp. 36-37. For an example of the post-Albright attempt to dismiss entirely the historicity of the patriarchs as well as their early Middle Bronze setting see T. L. Thompson, "The Background of the Patriarchs: A Reply to William Dever and Malcolm Clark," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 9 (1978): 2-43. A study of patriarchal chronological data against the larger environment is in itself most revealing and rewarding.

3 Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965).

4 For a full discussion of his method and its implications for pre-Monarchic dating see the author's book *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1966), pp. 96-99.

5 Whether one can go back earlier than Abram (or Terah) with confidence depends on his understanding of the nature of the biblical genealogies. Discussion of this problem would exceed the limits and purposes of this article. For the view that the genealogies are "closed" and that dateable events can include even creation, see the marginal notes of Archbishop James Ussher in many editions of the Authorized Version of the Bible. For the contrary position see K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1966), pp. 36-39.

6 This date of 1446 B.C. is almost universally rejected by those scholars who do not take 1 Kings 6:1 as a literal chronological datum. Most follow the so-called "late date," falling somewhere between 1290 and 1230 B.C. This is based on the assumptions that the city Rameses of Exodus 1:11 was built by the Hebrews for Pharaoh Rameses II (1290-1224) and that Israel was in Canaan by 1220 B.C. in order to have been mentioned in the Merneptah Stele (1220 B.C.). Allowing for some time in wilderness wandering, the Exodus probably, in this view, occurred around 1250 B.C. A recent discussion supporting these arguments is given by Roland de Vaux in *The Early History of Israel*, trans. David Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 388-92. He admits that if one were to take the biblical chronology of 1 Kings 6:1 and Judges 11:26 seriously, he must date the Exodus in the midfifteenth century (p. 389). It is only by permitting archaeological evidence to have priority over clear biblical evidence that any date later than the midfifteenth century can stand.

7 If Hoehner's argument that the sojourn was actually four hundred years rather than 430 can be sustained, all previous dates, of course, would have to be lowered by thirty years. See Harold W. Hoehner, "The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969):306-16. Hoehner's position is not wholly convincing, in that he dates the 430-period from the last recorded confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob (in his view, Gen. 35:9-15), when in fact the last confirmation was made en route to Egypt and so at the very beginning of the sojourn (Gen. 46:1-4).

8 There are variations from the Masoretic text figures in the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and other ancient versions, but there is no compelling reason, textual or otherwise, to prefer them over the Masoretic text in the passages

under consideration. For the numerical data of the versions see Gleason L. Archer, "The Chronology of the Old Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 362. Of course, critical skeptical scholarship dismisses all of these data as having little or no historical value (see e.g., Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM Press, 1961), pp. 67-68).

9   Acts 7:4. Stephen's information may be based on no longer extant Septuagint texts which are preserved, however, in the Samaritan Pentateuch. That version gives Terah's age at death as 145 years, an obvious attempt to harmonize Genesis 11:26 and 12:4. See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale Press, 1952), p 162.

10   A helpful recent study of biblical and ancient Near Eastern genealogies is that of Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). Wilson demonstrates the stereotypical nature of much of the "nonnarrative" type of genealogy.

11   This has been shown recently by Allen P. Ross in "The Table of Nations in Genesis" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, 1976), pp. 343-47.

12   This date is certain because the destruction story is an integral part of the narrative of the angelic visitation of Abram which occurred in his ninety-ninth year. The entire pericope (Gen. 18:1-19:38) is centered about the activities of the Lord and the two angels. It is not without interest that the recently discovered Ebla texts document the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah (listed in that order) as early as 2500-2400 B.C. but that they are never mentioned in extra-biblical texts later than 2000 B.C. This surely heightens the historical worth of at least this patriarchal story. On the Ebla reference see D. N. Freedman, "The Real Story of the Ebla Tablets, Ebla and the Cities of the Plain," *Biblical Archaeologist* 41 (1978):148-49; and Mitchell Dahood, "Ebla, Ugarit and the Old Testament," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 29 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 99, 107-8.

13   This figure is determined by the fact that Jacob was 130 when he descended to Egypt (Gen. 47:9) at which time Joseph was 30 + 7 + 2 or around thirty-nine years old as seen already. This means that Jacob was about ninety when Joseph was born. Joseph was evidently the last of the sons born in Haran, an event which preceded the six years when Jacob worked for Laban for wages (30:25). To put it another way, Joseph was born fourteen years after Jacob's arrival in Haran and seven years after his marriages in 1923 B.C.

14   This conclusion is based on the fact that Leah had six sons prior to Dinah's birth and all six were born in a seven-year period (Gen. 30:20; cf. 30:25-28; 31:41). In fact, each must have been born at the end of each year, leaving no time in that period for a seventh to be born. Hence Dinah's birth was sometime in the following six-year period or after Joseph's. Genesis 30:21 ("and afterward she bore a daughter") might also support this interpretation.

15   See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), 2:29.

16   Mamre, adjacent to Hebron, has an elevation of 3,300 feet above sea level, the highest point of all Judah. Adullam, about fifteen miles northwest, is more than 1,500 feet lower. Shechem is about the same elevation as Adullam. See Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 165.

17   One of the purposes of the Judah-Tamar story is to provide a rationale for the removal of Joseph to Egypt. As he was to say in retrospect, "God sent me before you to preserve you as a remnant in the earth" (Gen. 45:7). Though this is clearly a reference to Israel's physical preservation from famine, it also speaks of her removal from the baneful effects of a Canaanite pagan environment. On this see W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), pp. 364-65.

18   It is true that "five years" is very arbitrary but such expressions as "remain a widow until Shelah grows up" (38:11) and "in due time . . . the wife of Judah died"

(38:12) imply that some years are involved, five being, if anything, a conservative figure. It is tempting here to suggest that Perez and Zerah were not born of Judah and Tamar until after the first visit of the brothers to Egypt in 1878. The reason is that though Reuben agrees that his sons' lives might be taken if Benjamin is not returned (42:37), Judah makes no such offer but only vaguely says to Jacob, "I will be a surety for him; of my hand shall you require him. If I bring him not to you . . . let me bear the blame forever" (43:9). Perhaps Judah was childless. If so, the twins were born in 1877, as already concluded on different grounds.

19   This is the position of C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1: *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 371. The offspring of Benjamin are an even more serious problem in that Genesis 46:21 indicates that he had ten sons who accompanied him to Egypt. The genealogical list in Numbers 26:38-41 states, however, that one of these was actually a grandson! First Chronicles 7:6-8 and 8:1-5, the analysis of which cannot be considered here, also support the fact that some of Benjamin's descendants who moved "with him" to Egypt were grandsons. And yet Benjamin was not even born until after Jacob's return to Bethel, an event no earlier than 1910 B.C. (thirteen years after Jacob's marriages) and likely several years after that since there was a residence of a number of years in Shechem, a point to be made presently. In any case, it is impossible that Benjamin had grandsons by 1876 B.C. for he then was no more than twenty-five years of age or so.

different in the code of Christ. In these areas Christians are to take their guidelines from the New Testament and not the Old. In matters treated in both the Old and New Testaments, Christians still get their guidance from the New, reinforcing it with similar regulations in the Old.

SUMMARY

The Old Testament perspective on social ethics focuses on concern for the oppressed and on righteous living within the group. It does not command the establishment of justice in the world, nor the care of all the oppressed in the world. It gives no example for involvement in the rough-and-tumble of political life. It *does* show God's love for justice and holiness in personal living as well as in the community life of the theocracy. It shows God's abiding hatred of sin. The social ethics of the Old Testament are much more "isolationist" than those of the New Testament.

Abraham in History and Tradition

Part I: Abraham the Hebrew

Donald J. Wiseman

The study of Abraham in history and tradition has recently been revived. However, it is accompanied by a recrudescence of a critical trend in Old Testament scholarship which virtually dismisses Abraham as an eponymous ancestor, a mythological hero of legendary sagas, or the projection into the past of later Jewish ideologies seeking for a "founding father." On this basis the Genesis patriarchs are considered by many scholars to be unhistorical, and it is argued that this is no problem because their historicity is irrelevant to the theological value of the biblical narratives. With this development, Old Testament scholars have reacted against and reappraised the extrabiblical evidence which has led to the more conservative understanding and interpretation of a second-millennium B.C. "Patriarchal Age."[1] Both viewpoints will now need to be reevaluated in the light of the recent texts discovered at Ebla, which reveal for the first time the history, language, and culture of the Upper Euphrates in the latter half of the third millennium B.C.[2]

1 John van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974).
2 Giovanni Pettinato, "Testi cuneiformi del 3. millenium in paleo-cananeo rinvenuti nelta campagna 1974 a Tell Mardikh = Ebla," *Oriental..* 44 (1975): 361-74; and paper read at the XXIIIeme Rencontre Assyriologique Inter-

It is true that some of the comparisons made between the social background reflected in Genesis and extrabiblical evidence have arisen from the desire of scholars to find parallels in ancient Near Eastern texts. However, dismissing those parallels would not of itself argue against the historical origin or nature of the Genesis texts so much as against the various theories proposed for their interpretation.[3] Van Seters has rightly questioned some of these but goes beyond the evidence when he argues that "there is no real portrayal of a nomadic pre-settlement phase of Israelite society, nor any hint of the migratory movements or political realities of the second millennium B.C."[4] For him the Abrahamic tradition as it stands reflects "only a late date of composition and gives no hint by its content of any great antiquity in terms of biblical history."[5] His argument is that the few nomadic details — the references to camels and tents, the patriarch's presence and movements primarily confined to the Negeb, and their contact and political agreement with the Philistines — are all indications of a mid-first millennium B.C. origin.

It is the primary purpose of this paper to examine some of these contentions. However, these contentions will be examined more from an interpretive standpoint than from the chronological standpoint, since it can be shown that in the long "continuity" of tradition in the ancient Near Eastern traditions, social custom, legal convention, or literary form are by themselves no sure means of chronological identification.[6]

THE EXTENT OF PATRIARCHAL NOMADISM

Was Abraham a "nomad"? The Genesis account relates the movements of Abraham primarily in relation to two factors: the

nationale, Birmingham, England, July 8, 1976; cf. also his article, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 39 (May 1976): 44-52. It is reported that these texts make reference to Canaan, Palestine, and Syria ca. 2300 B.C. Many place-names may prove to be local to Ebla, and the appearance of personal names such as "Abraham" can be paralleled in other cuneiform texts (cf. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, pp. 22-36).

3 M. Selman, "Published and Unpublished Fifteenth Century B.C. Cuneiform Documents and Their Bearing on the Patriarchal Narratives of the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, 1975) and his article in *The Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976), forthcoming.

4 Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, pp. 121-22.

5 Ibid.

6 Donald J. Wiseman, "Israel - Literary Neighbours in the Thirteenth Century B.C.," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 5 (1977), forthcoming.

divine call, and the divine land-grant to his posterity. Thus the ultimate destination is declared from the beginning when "Terah took Abram his son and Lot . . . and Sarai . . . and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldeans, to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen. 11:31). En route at Haran after Terah's death the renewed call is still for Abraham to leave "land, family, and father's house to go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).[7] No details are given of the route, method, or time of travel. There is no reason to assume that a journey from southern Mesopotamia to Syro-Palestine was undertaken only by (semi-)nomads in antiquity. Movements in stages by groups of persons, possibly merchants, are attested by records of Old Babylonian itineraries.[8]

Gordon's suggestion that Ur (of the Chaldees) is to be identified with Ura' (modern Urfa' fifteen miles northwest of Haran)[9] has been adequately answered by Saggs, who has stressed, in addition to the philological weakness, the unlikely nature of a move eastward by Abraham before retracing his steps toward Canaan.[10] Moreover, Gordon's thesis, coupled with similarity of Old Babylonian place-names with patriarchal patronyms (e.g., Serug, Gen. 11:23; Turch [Terah] and Nahur [Nahor], Gen. 24:10) would still be evidence against van Seters' late date for such allusions. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the crossing of the Euphrates River ('*Eber nāri;* cf. Josh. 24:2-3).

Genesis places no stress on Abraham's "nomadism"; it merely states that he moved in response to the divine call from Haran to the land of Canaan, with no detail of that land which he crossed, to Shechem (Gen. 12:6). The route would have taken him through or near some of the city-states known to have dominated the region in both the second and first millennia B.C. At Moreh, near Shechem, Abram built an altar to the Lord after He in a theophany granted as a gift the land where he then was (Gen. 12:7). It is noteworthy that the first mention of "tents" is now made, and it is suggested that here (as subsequently near Bethel, Hebron, and at Beersheba) the tents indicate not so much his mode of living as a tent-shrine set up symbolically at places where he publicly avowed the promise

7 This is usually taken as an early source; it is quoted by Stephen (Acts 7:2-4).

8 William W. Hallo, "The Road to Emar," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 18 (1964): 57-88.

9 Cyrus H. Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 17 (1958): 28-31.

10 H. W. F. Saggs, "Ur of the Chaldees," *Iraq* 22 (1960): 200-209.

of the land as a token of its take-over.[11] A further journey to Bethel, near which another altar was erected and named in association with a "tent-site" (Gen. 12:8), was followed by a short journey southward. Following the diversion to Egypt due to famine (Gen. 12:10-20), Abraham returned to the promised land, to the previously occupied tent- and altar-site near Bethel (13:4).

Following the separation from Lot, which sprang from local Canaanite opposition and insufficiency of grazing for the flocks and herds, Abraham was given a further revelation about the extent of the land (Gen. 13:5-13). From a vantage point on high ground he was able to look north, south, east, and west at the covenant-promised territory before walking throughout its length and breadth (13:17; cf. Josh. 18:4-8), acting as one who already held title to it. The southward measurement was made by Abraham first; he moved to Mamre (13:18) where he stayed for some time (18:1). There a further theophany reaffirmed the possession of the land through an heir. Then he went further south between Kadesh and Shur (20:1) to stay in the land then dominated by Abimelech of Gerar (20:1-18) which bordered Beersheba. The latter was taken over and was marked as a special place by tent and altar and "sacred tree," to become the symbol of the southernmost part of the promised land stretching "from Dan to Beersheba." The references to "tents" used by Abraham's successors refer principally to these same sites except for the use of a tent by Lot prior to his establishing a permanent lodging in a house in Sodom (13:12; cf. 19:2) and of Jacob's inclusion of tents and camels in his caravan on the flight from Laban (31:28). He is described as staying "among the settlements ['tents,' AV]" (Gen. 25:25) when his settled life is contrasted with the nomadic and hunting existence of Esau. Jacob himself settled in a house at Succoth (33:17).

These scant references to tents are not in themselves indicative of any special type of nomadism, even of the "enclosed nomadism" described by Rowton.[12]

THE TYPE OF PATRIARCHAL NOMADISM

The Genesis picture is not specifically one of semi-nomadism though it could be compared in some features with the well-documented nomadism of Syria and the Upper Euphrates region in the

11 Donald J. Wiseman, "They Lived in Tents," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 7 (1977), forthcoming.
12 M. B. Rowton, "Enclosed Nomadism," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974): 1-16.

second millennium B.C. or with the even earlier activities of the Sutu (ca. 2700 B.C.) or Egyptian *šsyw*.[13] Some scholars, however, have tended to exaggerate the supposedly "nomadic" elements by reference to named groups in the same region at different periods (e.g., Amurru, Aramu) and to their sedentary condition by reference to the settled life of the same tribes.

Rowton has shown that long-range nomads, dependent on the limitations of the desert and rainfall, are rare and probably confined throughout history to north and south Arabia. They are distinct from the true self-sufficient long-range "external nomadism" of central Asia and central Arabia. The short-range semi-nomads engaged in pastoral nomadism, owning livestock and a few camels, and their migration might have involved tribal communities. Such combinations of camels, sheep, goats, and donkeys moved slowly and never more than a day's journey from water. They followed the seasons and interacted with the local market where their more sedentary brethren lived.[14] For this reason there is no single term in the ancient Near Eastern texts for such people who could be designated by their role or settlement. The individual group with its family head or chief (*abum*, "father") and elders might be referred to by several names (e.g., Ubrabum, Yahrurum, Amnānum), which could denote the total group (e.g., Benē-Yamina = "Benjaminites").[15] Nomads and sedentary members of a single tribe linked the former to an urban base as has been suggested for Abraham and Nahur (Aram).[16] The long continuity of this tradition can be illustrated from the traditional genealogies of the second millennium B.C. (Hammurapi);[17] Assyria (King List);[18] and Israel (Abraham

13 R. Giveon, *Les bédouins shosou des documents égyptiens* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971); also references are made to nomads in the Ebla texts.
14 M. B. Rowton, "Autonomy and Nomadism in Western Asia," *Orientalia* 42 (1973): 252.
15 So also Midian, Amalek, and Benē-Qedem, all Midianites (Moshé Anbar, "Changement thes noms thes tribus nomades dans la relation d'un même événement," *Biblica* 49 [1968]: 221-32).
16 A. Malamat, "Aspects of Tribal Society," in *La Civilisation de Mari*, ed. J. R. Kupper (Liège: Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, 1967), pp. 129-38.
17 J. J. Finkelstein, "The Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 20 (1966): 95-118; cf. W. G. Lambert, "Another Look at Hammurabi's Ancestors," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 22 (1968): 1-2.
18 F. R. Kraus, *Könige die in Zelten wohnten* (Amsterdam: N. V. Noord-Hollandsche Uirgevers Maarschappij, 1965); cf. Ebla text linking the "ancestor" Tudiya with the Duddia of Assur, a vassal of Ebrum of Ebla.

and Nahor, Gen. 22:20-24; 25:1-4). Such semi-nomads could become very influential and take over the government of an urban settlement.[19]

The designation and characteristic functions of these groups varied but little over the centuries. The Amorites *(Amurru* — "westerners" centered on Jebel Bišī) are first named in texts from Fara (ca. 2600 B.C.) and in a date formula of the reign of sar-kalli-sarri (2250 B.C.) and last as an ethnic group in Babylonia in the time of Ammisaduqa (ca. 1645 B.C.).[20] The Habiru ('Apiru), though occasionally mentioned in Syria (Brak, Syria, ca. 2200 B.C.), Mari, and Alalah, are increasingly referred to as semi-nomads in the west from the seventeenth century B.C. They performed similar functions within the same general area as the Amorites and disappeared with the Hurrians about the thirteenth century. Opinions are divided as to whether these Hapiru (Egyptian *'prw*) are to be equated with the Hebrew *'ibrî(m)* linguistically or in function, since Habiru designates a sociological phenomenon rather than an ethnic group.[21] The role of the semi-nomad is then taken up into the term *Aramu* (Aramean), though before the thirteenth century this is already used of a place-name in the Upper Euphrates (Naram-Sin, ca. 2350 B.C.) and at Mari, Alalah, Drehem, and Egypt.[22] Van Seters' assumption that references to Arameans or to related groups must always portray first millennium B.C. background is therefore open to strong criticism. The designation *Ara/i/bu* (Arab) for semi-nomads in the Damascus area is first attested in Shalmaneser III's sixth year among the allies facing him at the Battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) and thereafter is primarily used by the Assyrians in their rare references to rulers in northern Arabia. At this time the existence of the Assyrian provincial system precludes this from being taken as the background of the Abrahamic narratives.

It has been proposed that Amurru, (H)apiru, Aramu, and Arabu are to be understood as dialectical variants, used at different periods, of a term for "semi-nomad."[23] Many attempts have been made to identify "Abram the Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13, *hā'ibrî*) with the Habiru of their fellows; though lately it has been argued to be

19 E.g., the founders of second millennium dynasties: Naplānum at Larsa; Sumu-Abum at Babylon; Abdi-Erah at Kish; and Yaggid-Lim at Mari.
20 M. Liverani, "The Amorites," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 100-133.
21 H. Cazelles, "The Hebrews," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, p. 23.
22 A. Malamat, "The Aramaeans," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, pp. 134-35.
23 Ibid., p. 135.

a denominative from Eber (Gen. 10:21), now equated by some with Ebrum king of Ebla ca. 2300 B.C. Others consider the references to the "Hebrew" slaves (Gen. 39:14,17; Exod. 1:15-19; etc.) to indicate these semi-nomadic groups rather than an identifiable ethnic identification.[24] However, there seems to be no logical requirement for taking either "Abram the Hebrew" or "the ancestor who was a roving Aramean" (Deut. 26:5, possibly Jacob) as late interpolations, in the light of the early and frequent occurrences of both terms.

While it may be argued that the designation "Abraham the Hebrew" accords with much of the traditions of the early semi-nomads or Habiru, there is no certainty as to the meaning of the word "Hebrew." Suggestions include "dusty ones" (*epru*); "providing/receiving subsidies" (*epēru; 'pr*);[25] "transferred, without a stable habitat" (*'apr*); "confederates" (*ebru*); "lord" (Hurr. *ewri*);[26] or, more likely, "one who passes through, crosses territory" (*'ebēru*), i.e., a stranger who has left his country and crossed a frontier or "one who seeks a new means of existence after having lost his place in the old order of things."[27] Though this last agrees with the Septuagint interpretation of Genesis 14:13, which describes Abraham as "the wanderer, the transient, he who passes through," it can be questioned whether this is in keeping with the stated life of the patriarch.

ABRAHAM AND THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

The references to Abraham in the land are primarily concerned with the land as promised to him by divine grant. This does appear to place the Genesis narratives outside the limited theme of any land which may be shown to have been inherited by semi-nomads (even though the form or structure of the narrative does show similarities with royal grants of land, as argued by Weinfeld).[28]

24 J. Weingreen, "Saul and Habiru," *IVth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 1:63-66.
25 G. Posener, "Textes Egyptiens," in *Le problème des Habiru*, ed. J. Bottéro (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1954), p. 166.
26 Cazelles, "The Hebrews," pp. 4-16; F. F. Bruce, in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 12-15.
27 Donald J. Wiseman, *The Word of God for Abraham and Today* (London: Westminster Chapel, 1959), p. 11.
28 M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 184-203; S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Divine Grants of Land to the Patriarchs," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 (1971): 509-10.

While such grants might associate tribes with sedentary groups, Abraham is concerned not with his "nomadism" but with his status as a "(resident-)alien" (*gēr*), *and a landless one at that* (*gēr weṭôsāb*). But this is when he is in Canaanite Kirjath-Arba bargaining for a burialplace for Sarai (Gen. 23:4; cf. 37:1; 35:27).[29] All other references to his status as a *ger* refer to his temporary residence outside the land granted him by God — when in Egypt (Gen. 12:10; cf. 15:13; 47:49), in Gerar (20:1; cf. 26:3), and in the territory of Abimelech (21:23-34). Lot is also called a *gēr* in Sodom (19:9), and Jacob is a *gēr* when in Laban's territory (23:4; cf. 28:4).

There is therefore no reason to think that Abraham considered himself only temporary, or merely a transient, or without rights, in the very land granted him by his God. In this lay the measure of his faith, in claiming *de facto* and *de jure* what had been promised by God *de jure*. Hebrews 11:14, 16 certainly agrees with this interpretation, for there too the description of the great faith of this "resident-alien and exile" (cf. "strangers or passing travellers," NEB) lays stress on his *settling*, albeit as a foreigner, in the promised land (Heb. 11:9). This does not mean that he, like any man, was unaware of the transitory nature of life or of the temporary status of life on earth (cf. Ps. 39:12; 1 Chron. 29:15).

29 Manfred R. Lehmann's interpretation of this transaction as Hittite ("Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 129 [1953]: 15-18) has been questioned by Gene M. Tucker ("The Legal Background of Genesis 23," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 [1966]: 77-84). However, Tucker's (and van Seters' [*Abraham in History and Tradition*, p. 99]) equation of the literary structure of Genesis 23 with *Zweigesprächsurkunde* (following Herbert Petschow, "Die Neubabylonische Zwiegesprächsurkunde und Genesis 23," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 19 [1965]: 103-20, a late neo-Babylonian form) ignores the fact that this type of document occurs also in the earlier (old Babylonian) period (*Bibliotheca Orientalis* 22 [1965]: 171; *Cuneiform Texts in the British Museum* [London: British Museum, 1964], vol. 45, no. 60).

Apostles and the Apostolate in the New Testament

Robert Duncan Culver

A number of currents of thought in contemporary church life invite fresh attention to the precise nature and purpose of the New Testament apostolate. Some Roman Catholics and "charismatics" are presenting new ideas about revelation. In this age of lawlessness, persons in many denominations and sects are raising questions about ecclesiastical authority. Others have misconceptions about "the signs of an apostle." In addition, there is the growing habit of referring to certain foreign missionaries or strong religious leaders as apostles — apparently intended literally rather than metaphorically.

The word *apostle* is a loan word from Greek by way of Latin. As with the word *baptize*, another such loan word, the reader of the Bible must decide what it means from the way it is used. The bare elements of the Greek word ἀπόστολος mean "one sent forth." The root meaning of the word, however, does not indicate how, when, by whom, nor for what purpose he is to be sent.

LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

New Testament use alone is decisive for the meaning of an apostle and for the theological significance of the apostolate. This is true of many important theological terms of Scripture but peculiarly true of this one. Though the word was already old, and there is a near-equivalent Hebrew word used in the Old Testament and in Rabbinical literature, the New Testament use is unprecedented.

PART II
MATERIALS FOR AN
OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

Chapter 5

Prolegomena to the Promise: Prepatriarchal Era

The hallmark of Genesis 1-11 is to be found in the Edenic, Noachic, and Abrahamic "blessing." With the announcement of God's promise to *bless* all created beings in the beginning of the prepatriarchal narrative (1:22,28), at strategic points in the course of its narrative (5:2; 9:1), and at its conclusion (12:1-3), the theme, unity, and perimeters of the theology of Genesis 1-11 are secure.

Unfortunately, this block of biblical materials has rarely been treated in its unified contribution to theology. All too often theologians have restricted their attention, as Claus Westermann observed,[1] to a discussion of Creation, the Fall, and man's personal sin before God. However, the canonical shape of the message as we have it in Genesis 1-11 asks of the interpreter much more than those meager results. Man is placed before God in the Fall, but he is likewise located in a society and in the state according to chapters 4 and 6. Moreover, man was the recipient of much more than his life and successive curses.

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[1] Claus Westermann, *Creation*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 17-31. His analysis of Genesis 1-11 agrees at several points with conclusions we had already reached independently.

The pattern of events in all eleven chapters is too closely interwoven to be left aside by the exegete or theologian. Structurally they exhibit the juxtaposition of God's gift of blessing with man's revolt. The divine word of blessing initiates every type of increase and legitimate dominion; it follows the central tragedy of the section—the Flood—and concludes the section in the blessing of the gospel itself. Man's revolt, on the other hand, is evident primarily in the three catastrophes of the Fall, the Flood, and the destruction of the tower of Babel. Here too the divine word is present; only it is a word of judgment and not of blessing.

But even this triple rhythm of blessing and curse, hope and doom, did not exhaust the basic structure and theology of the text in its wholeness. God's goal for history, while marked by the insertions of His word at critically important junctures, was opposed by man's continual rejection of these divine blessings in the areas of the family (4:1-16), cultural achievements (vv. 17-24), a doctrine of work (2:15), the development of the human race (5; 10; 11:10-32), and the state (6:1-6).

The double line of man's failure and God's special word of grace or blessing can be represented in this way:

Man's Failure		God's Blessing
1. The Fall (Gen. 3)	→	a. Promise of a Seed (Gen. 3:15)
2. The Flood (Gen. 6-8)	→	b. Promise of God's dwelling in Shem's tents (Gen. 9:25-27)
3. The Scattering (Gen. 11)	→	c. Promise of world-wide blessing (Gen. 12:1-3).

WORD OF CREATION

But as the theology of this section began, so did the world—by the divine word of a personal, communicating God. Ten times the text reiterates this lead-off statement: "And God said" (Gen. 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,29; 2:18). Creation, then, is depicted as the result of the dynamic word of God. To call forth the world in direct response to His word was to act as Jesus of Nazareth did when in response to His word men were healed. Said the centurion, "Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matt. 8:8). So the word was likewise spoken here, and the world came into being. This theological affirmation appears later in the psalms:

> By the word of the Lord the heavens were made
> and all their hosts by the breath of His mouth . . .
> He spoke, and it came into being;
> He commanded, and it stood forth.
> —Psalm 33:6,9

Whether secondary causes were also thereby set into motion in effecting the result cannot be determined from the text. Every time the text would seem to imply a mediate creation (i.e., where the existing materials or forces of nature might be authorized or endowed by God to do the work of carrying out the creation order—the three instances being: "Let the earth bring forth" [Gen. 1:11]; "Let the waters bring forth" [v. 20]; "Let the earth bring forth" [v. 24]), the next verse in two of the three instances (vv. 21,25) attributes the same things, which appeared to be immediately authorized to effect the new work directly to God. Only Genesis 1:11 might be an exception to representing God's work as immediate creation since verse 12 continues that same way of speaking. However, that may be all it was: a way of highlighting the recipient (the earth or the waters) of the forthcoming benefits of God.

On the whole, however, the method of creation was as clear as its source: it was God who created, and He did it by His word. But word-creation stressed more than method. It also emphasized that creation was in accordance with God's prior knowledge of the world, for He spoke what He had previously thought of and planned. Likewise His purposeful design and predetermined function of all things was underscored since He often *named* what He created. Thus the essence and purpose of His creation was outlined from its inception. And if He named these things, He then *owned* them, for one only names what He owns or is given jurisdiction over.

Often the discussion of the time of creation consumes more time and energy than it should. Theology generally is disinterested in this discussion. However, the decision over whether Genesis 1-2 reports an absolute beginning or a relative beginning is central to its concern. Recently, many modern translations have prefered a "when . . . then" construction for Genesis 1:1-3: "When God created, . . . the earth being without form, . . . then God said."

While on some grammatical grounds such a construction is possible, there are strong arguments against such an analysis. Both the Hebrew Masoretic punctuation and those Greek transliterations of the Hebrew text into Greek letters show convincingly that there was quite a respectable history of interpretation which took the first word, *bᵉrēšit*, as an absolute noun, "in the beginning," rather than as a Hebrew construct noun, "in beginning of creating."[2] Therefore,

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[2] See for further support and additional arguments, E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1964), pp. 1-14. See also the fine article by Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1: A Critical Look," *The Bible Translator* 22(1971): 154-67.

Genesis 1:1 commits itself to the absolute beginning of everything ("heaven and the earth") outside of God.

The use of the verb *bārā'*, "create" (Gen. 1:1,21,27; 2:3-4; 5:1-2; 6:7), does not appear to be as determinative for an absolute beginning as some might expect it to be. While the verb is indeed restricted to God as its sole subject, is never used with any agency of material, and is rendered by the strongest Greek verb for create *(ktizō)* in the LXX, it also appears in parallel usage to two other words in the creation narrative: *'āśâh*, "to make, do" (Gen. 1:26-27; cf. also its later parallels in Isa. 41:20; 45:18), and *yāṣar*, "to form, mold" (Gen. 2:7; cf. its later usage in Isa. 43:1; 45:18; Amos 4:13). In Isaiah 45:18 all three verbs appear in parallelism, thus disallowing any major distinctive between them:

> Thus says the Lord,
> Who created *(bārā')* the heavens, He is God!
> Who formed *(yāṣar)* the earth
> and made *('āśâh)* it
> He established *(kûn)* it
> He did not create *(bārā')* it a chaos
> He formed *(yāṣar)* it to be inhabited.
> I am the Lord, there is no one else.

To be sure, "create" does appear at the outset of the creative order (Gen. 1:1), at the first appearance of life (v. 21), and with the designation that man is made in the image of God (v. 27). But this cannot be used to support the untenable view of mechanistic evolution with three divine interruptions, as it were, at the creation of matter, the creation of life, and the creation of the *imago Dei*. The preceding evidence of parallel usage of creation verbs sees to that.

We conclude, then, that God initiated the creation process out of nothing but His word. More detailed statements will need to wait until Hebrews 11:3 states a doctrine of *ex nihilo*, "out of nothing," in definitive terms.

The "days" of creation climax in the creation of man and woman. They were the chief interest of our writer. For in typical style observed throughout the whole work on Genesis, he quickly traced the entire picture caring for those details which were only of passing interest first before he treated in detail the subject or persons which concerned him most. Adam and Eve both were made on the sixth day, but the duration of that "day" *(yôm)* and the details of how they were created are detailed in Genesis 2:4ff. By now the reader is aware of the author's elasticity in his use of the word "day": it shares

the same range of meaning as is known in modern English. It is equal to daylight (1:5); our calendar days which make up the year (v. 14); and the whole span of creation, or as we would say, the *day* of the horse and buggy (2:4).

The sixth creative period of time must have lasted more than twenty-four hours, for Adam grew lonely for a companion (Gen. 2:20). Surely this took more than an afternoon's idle thought! Moreover, he busied himself with the task of naming the animals as his loneliness continued to build. Finally, God created a woman, and it was still that sixth "day."

Through the influence mainly of Augustine, the early church—up until the middle of the nineteenth century—held the majority view that there had been three creative "days" before the calendar type of days were created on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14). Thus the usage urged here is not a modern backward projection to an antiquated text that needed to be rescued from embarrassment. It was the clear teaching of the text itself.

Some of the details of what followed the divine word of Genesis 1:26 are now supplied in 2:4ff. Adam was not "alive" *(nepeš ḥayyâh,* literally, but inaccurately, "living soul") until God had taken some of the dust of the ground, shaped it, and breathed into it the breath of life. Now to be sure, there are anthropomorphic expressions here, but they are figures of God's direct activity. Man's vitality was a direct gift from God, for prior to that he was not "alive"—that much is certain!

Eve too was "built" *(bānâh)* by God, yet in such a way that her propinquity to Adam was assured. She was to be "bone of [his] bone and flesh of [his] flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Together they originated from the hand of God. Man was so linked to the soil that as his fortunes went, so did the fortunes of nature; and woman was likewise linked to man, for she was "taken from man."

Both, however, shared equally in the highest gift given to any of the orders of creation: the image of God. Male and female shared alike and equally in this highest mark yet set on creation. Only later in NT terms will the definitional content of this image become clear (e.g., knowledge, Col. 3:10; righteousness and holiness, Eph. 4:24). In the Genesis record, the precise content of the image is less specific. We see it expressed in concepts such as the possibility of fellowship and communication with God, the exercise of responsible dominion and leadership over the creation owned by God, and the fact that in some way unspecified as yet, God is the prototype of

which man and woman are merely copies, replicas (*selem*, "carved or hewn statue or copy") and facsimilies (*d°mût*, "likeness").[3]

WORD OF BLESSING

The word of creation was followed by a word of blessing. Accordingly, all creatures of sea and air were endowed with reproductive capabilities and given a divine mission:

> God blessed them by saying:
> "Be fruitful and multiply
> and fill the waters of the seas;
> and let the birds multiply on the earth."
>   —Genesis 1:22

This part of the blessing mankind shares with the created order mentioned in verse 22, but an additional part of our blessing appears to stem decidedly from the gift of the image of God. Almost identical terms are used in verses 26 and 28 to amplify one part of the image that was foremost in the mind of God when He so graciously benefited that first couple; they were to subdue and have dominion over all creation (v. 28).

Of course, the divine mission to "subdue" (*kābaš*) and to "dominate" (*rādâh*) was no license for mankind to abuse the creative orders. Man was not to be a bully and a law to himself. He was only to be God's viceroy and therefore accountable to Him. Creation was to benefit man, but man was to benefit God!

Once more the divine word of blessing came: "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it [He] ceased (*šābat*) from all His work which He had done in creation" (Gen. 2:3). The day is called the Sabbath (*šabbāt*) because it was the day commemorating God's cessation (*šābat*) of His work. In this way He put a division between His work of creation and all subsequent work (usually termed providence). Thus history has the first of three great divine markers found in revelation: (1) the Sabbath; (2) the "it is finished" of Psalm 22:31; John 19:30 (the division between redemption promised and redemption accomplished); and (3) "it is done" of Revelation 21:6 (the division between history and eternity!).

Thus God made the seventh "day" holy as a perpetual memorial to the completion of the entire universe and all that was in it. His

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[3]The literature on the image of God is huge. Some of the more representative but recent contributions are: D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19(1968): 55-103; James Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis — A Study in Terminology," *Bulletin of John Ryland's Library* 51(1968): 11-26.

"rest" was to be symbolic for man both in his own rhythm of work and cessation from labor as well as for his eternal hopes. So decisive was this ending that the writer also abruptly "stops" his narration of events; he does not conclude with the expected: "And there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day."

All had been completed. Everything had been done. It was all "good"; in fact, it was all "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Every function, every being, and every blessing necessary to carrying out life and its joys were now in hand. But this was all an untested goodness.

FIRST WORD OF PROMISE: SEED

To test man's obedience and free decision to follow his creator, God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden with a prohibition that Adam and Eve were not to eat its fruit. As such, the tree contained no magical enzymes or vitamins; it simply stood for the possibility of man's rebellion against the simple word of God. In eating the fruit, mankind would personally "know," i.e., experientially taste, the opposite side of all the good they currently experienced. The totality of experience—both good and bad—would be in their repertoire of sensations.

Another factor must be added before the theology of the Fall can be understood. The serpent (*hannāhāš*), that creature who was "more subtle than the beasts of field" (Gen. 3:1), was also present in the garden. The craftiness and subtlety of the serpent was comparably greater than any of the beasts of the field.[4]

Most know that the NT identified this serpent with Satan: "God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20); "The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2); "The serpent deceived Eve by his cunning ... for Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:3,14). But few recognize that he is treated as such in these passages as well.

Satan's form and shape are no more implied by his appellation serpent than by the name dragon. Nor is the curse on him determinative for setting his morphology. Genesis 3:14 only asserts that his conquest was so secure that "on his belly he would go" (cf. Gen.

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[4]The Hebrew *mikkōl* can be taken in Genesis 3:1,14 as a partitive—"any of the beasts of the field" or as a comparative "than the beasts of the field." But in 3:14 all agree the same construction must be comparative. Context also dictates in favor of our rendering. See Paul Haupt, "The Curse on the Serpent," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 35(1916): 155-62.

49:17; Job 20:14,16; Ps. 140:3; Isa. 59:5; Mic. 7:17). Also, his contemptible station and abject humility were so real that he would lick the dust, or as we say today, "bite the dust." Both phrases were oriental pictures from the ancient Near East of vanquished mortals: they laid face down prostrate before the conquering monarchs often forming nothing more than a footstool for his throne.[5] Reptiles do not, of course, eat dirt for food; but Satan would taste defeat as a result of his part in the temptation. Also observe carefully that God had already created "creepers" in Genesis 1:24 and had pronounced them "good" (v. 25)!

The serpent consistently spoke on his own behalf in the dialog with the woman; he was not a surrogate for someone else. He was party to what God had said; in fact, he knew the possible alternatives and eventualities from his own knowledge. To the woman, he was a person and not one of the animals, for she did express surprise at being addressed by him. She was, however, offended by the distorted narrowness which he attributed to God and the limited freedom of the first couple. It was grossly unfair to attribute to God the fact that they were denied the privilege of eating from any of the trees of the garden.

Deception worked its trick, however, and the woman succumbed to the heavy pressure and cunning argumentation of the tempter himself. Adam also disobeyed, but on less strenuous grounds than those laid upon the woman. Thus the first tragedy of failure of three selected by the writer for theological reflection set the scene for a new word of divine blessing. If any was to come from any place, it would be from God.

It was a prophetic word of judgment and deliverance addressed to the serpent (Gen. 3:14-15), the woman (v. 16), and the man (vv. 17-19). The reason for the curse was stated in each case: (1) Satan beguiled the woman; (2) the woman listened to the serpent; and (3) the man listened to the woman—no one listened to God!

Consequently the ground would feel the effects of man's Fall. It would bring forth thorns and thistles as well as man's sweat. Meanwhile children would be born with pain, and a woman's "turning" (*t'šûqâh*), not "desire," to her husband would result in the fact that he would "rule over" (*māšal*) her. The serpent, for his part, would face the disgrace of certain defeat.

But in the midst of the heavy dirge of gloom and rebuke came God's surprising word of prophetic hope (Gen. 3:15). A divinely

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[5]Cf. the Amarna Tablets. E.A. 100:36; Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 49:23; Micah 7:17.

instigated hostility ("I will put enmity") between the person of the serpent and the woman, between his "seed" and her "seed," climaxes with the triumphant appearance of a "he"—no doubt a representative person of the woman's seed. He would deliver a lethal blow to the head of Satan while the best the serpent would be able or even permitted to do would be to nip the heel of this male descendant.

Who this male descendant was to be was not immediately revealed. Perhaps Eve thought Cain was that one. She named her son Cain saying she had "gotten a man, even the Lord" (Gen. 4:1); at least, that is one way of rendering the enigmatic phrase. Regardless of how it is to be interpreted, she was mistaken; and the biblical text only records her longings and perhaps hints at the clear understanding she had of Genesis 3:15.

But God had not been silent. He had spoken, and His word prophesied of another day when a complete reversal of the serpent's temporary coup would happen as a result of the one who had spoken so authoritatively.

Furthermore, the blessing God had promised to mankind did continue. The genealogy of the ten most significant men in the antediluvian period recorded in Genesis 5 was one evidence of that blessing. They were "fruitful" and they did "multiply" just as Genesis 5:2 reaffirmed that word saying, "Male and female He created them and He blessed them." And so they had "sons and daughters."

Mankind was blessed in the fields (Gen. 4:1-2) and in cultural advances, also (vv. 17-22). Moreover, the selection of the twenty men leading up to Abraham plotted the progress of that "seed" promised to Eve as well as the agents of that blessing for their contemporaries.

Meanwhile the theme of judgment continued to mark the record. There was another notice of banishment from the immediate presence of the Lord. Just as Adam and Eve had been sent forth in Genesis 3:23-24 from the Garden of Eden, so Cain, the murderer of his brother Abel, was condemned to be "a fugitive and wanderer on the earth" (4:12-16).

So intimate had that sense of presence been that when offerings were brought to the Lord, it was the Lord Himself who first inspected the man (Gen. 4:4-5) and then the offering. God valued the heart condition of the offerer more than the gift he brought. Thus it was that jealousy broke out in the institution of the family, resulting in murder and the necessary imposition of the theme of judgment.

I'd lost the meaning
of the miracle —
but you reminded me
in time you reminded me
just in time you reminded me

A little child unaware
but nonetheless you were there

SECOND WORD OF PROMISE: THE GOD OF SHEM

The earth's second crisis came with the subversion of the institution of the state as it led an unruly populace in the practice of evil. Already a proud Lamech had begun to distort the purpose of government with his boastful tyranny and polygamy (Gen. 4:23-24). He was not to be challenged or rebuked by anyone. If Cain would be avenged by God sevenfold, then Lamech would be avenged seventy-seven times.

In the midst of the blessing of God—"men began to multiply on the face of the earth" (Gen. 6:1)—came the heaping up of evil. The rulers of the day, having adopted for themselves the Near Eastern titulary of "sons of God,"[6] autocratically began to multiply as many wives for themselves as they pleased. Their lust for a "name," i.e., a reputation (v. 4), led them to compound their excesses and abuse the purposes of their office.

In exasperation God gave up on mankind. His Spirit would not always continue to strive with men (Gen. 6:3). Such "mighty men" (v. 4), or aristocrats (*nᵉpilîm gibborîm*) must be halted in their wickedness. The hearts of men and women were filled continually with evil. Once again the theme of expulsion will come, only in a much more tragic and final way: God would blot man from the face of the earth (v. 7).

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8), for he was "a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (v. 9). Thus the earth's second greatest time of need, according to this text, was to be relieved as it had been in Genesis 3:15 with an enactment of the salvation of God. There was a righteous remnant—not by accident or by any means of partiality. Noah's father, Lamech, found in Noah—at the time of his birth—the comfort that his work in the earth previously cursed by the Lord would now be lightened with Noah's help (5:29). The reference to Genesis 3:17 is patent, and the unity of this section to chapters 3-4 is clear.

The wickedness forcing the hand of God was not an inevitable fate alloted to all men now that the Fall was a *fait accompli*. There had been righteous men. Consider Enoch. "He walked with God" for 300 years, not as a hermit in isolation, but as a man raising a family of sons and daughters (Gen. 5:22). So pleased was God with his life of obedience and faith that "he was not" on earth any longer; God "took him" (v. 24). The text handles so easily the issue of mortal man

[6]Meredith Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24(1961-62): 187-204.

being ushered into the very presence of God that we are amazed that no further explanation or caveat follows. Did Enoch's translation serve as a paradigmatic model for OT men until further revelation filled in the hiatus of information? The revelation of that fact would always be available if men wanted to ponder its implications.

Noah was of that stock. He found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was "righteous before God in [his] generation" (Gen. 7:1). Instructed by God, he built an ark. Thus he and his family experienced the salvation of God while judgment came on the rest of mankind.

The divine blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," was again repeated; this time to Noah, his wife, his sons, their wives, and every living thing on the earth, in the air, and on the sea (Gen. 8:17; 9:1,7). Here God added His special covenant with nature. He would maintain "seedtime, harvest, cold, heat, summer, winter, day, and night" without interruption as long as the earth remained (8:22). The contents of these promises formed an "everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh" (9:8,11,16) as signified by the rainbow in the sky. Along with this note of God's blessing was His explicit refusal "to never again curse (*qallēl*) the ground for the sake of man" (8:21), a reminder of a similar curse on the ground in Genesis 3:17. Likewise the reference to the "imaginations of [man's] heart" (*yēṣer lēb*) in 8:21 recalled a similar phrase using the same word (*yēṣer*) in Genesis 6:5. Given the repeated appearance of such features, it may be confidently asserted that the structural unity stretched from Genesis 1-11.[7]

The word of judgment and salvation reached its highest point in the aftermath of the earth's second crisis. It came through Noah after he learned what his son Ham had done to him while he was sleeping off the effects of his wine.

The structure of Genesis 9:25-27 is a heptastich which is divided into three parts by the repeated refrain of Canaan's servitude, a son of guilty Ham:

> And he said,
> Cursed be Canaan;
> A servant of servants will he be to his brothers.
> —verse 25

[7]See the informative discussion of R. Rendtorff, "Genesis 8:21 und die Urgeschichte des Yahwisten," *Kirche und Dogma* 7(1961): 69-81, as cited by W. M. Clark, "The Flood and the Structure of the Prepatriarchal History," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83(1971): 205-10. Rendtorff argued that the age of curse and primeval history both concluded in Genesis 8:21. As Clark pointed out, Genesis 9:25f. does raise the curse again, but it is of limited application to Canaan, and it is followed by an immediate blessing.

And he said,
    Blessed be the Lord God of Shem;
    Let Canaan be a slave to him.
                                                —verse 26

God will enlarge Japhet,
    But He will dwell in the tents of Shem;
    Let Canaan be a slave to him.
                                                —verse 27

Now the key issue is this: Who is the subject of the verb "he will dwell" in Genesis 9:27? We concur with the judgment of the Targum of Onkelos, Philo, Maimonides, Rashi, Aben Ezra, Theodoret, Baumgarten, and Delitzsch that the subject is "God." Our reasons are these: (1) the subject of the previous clause is presumed to continue into the next clause where the subject is unexpressed; (2) the use of the indirect object of the previous line as subject ("Japhet") would require strong contextual reasons for doing so; (3) the context of the next several chapters designates Shem as the first in honor of blessings; and (4) the Hebrew phrase w^{e}yiškōn b^e'oh^{o}lê šēm, "and he will dwell in the tents of Shem," hardly makes sense if attributed to Japhet, for Japhet had already been granted the blessing of expansion.

The plan of the whole prophecy appears to devote the first strophe only to Canaan, the second to Shem and Canaan, and the third to all three brothers. On balance, then, the best option is to regard God as promising to Shem a special blessing. He would dwell with the Semitic peoples. The word for "dwell" is related to the later concept of Mosaic theology of the Shekinah glory of God wherein the presence of God over the tabernacle was evidenced by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Hence, the man Shem would be the one through whom the "seed" promised earlier would now come. Had not God said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem" (Gen. 9:26)? And why did He use this distinctive form of address? Could it be that the blessing and indwelling were linked? And could it be that they were God's next provision to earth's latest crisis?

THIRD WORD OF PROMISE:
A BLESSING TO ALL THE NATIONS

The third and final crisis to hit the earth during this period of mixed blessing and curse was the concerted effort put forth by the human race to organize and preserve their unity around some architectural symbol. As they put it, "Let us make a reputation [liter-

ally, 'name'] for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4).[8]

Even though the blessing of God continued to be realized in their multiplication (Gen. 11:10-32) and their filling the earth with some seventy nations (10:1-32), the thoughts of their hearts were again directed away from the glory of God or His provisions. The judgment of God came in the double form of the confounding of their speech and the scattering of the peoples over the face of the earth. But again the sin-curse theme was closely matched with a divine grace-blessing theme.

Instead of uniting men around an ethno-political project aimed at the glorification of man and his abilities to meet the needs of a disparate community of nations, God provided His word of blessing once again. It was a word that climaxed every blessing pronounced in the prepatriarchal narrative. Five times over Genesis 12:1-3 repeated the word "blessing." Nor was it any surprise that it was a word directed to one of Shem's descendants (cf. 9:27), Abraham. He was himself to be blessed; yet he was thereby to be a blessing to all the nations of the world. What the nations could not attain on their own organization and goals would now be given to them in grace.

The number of people included in "all the families of the earth" (mišp^{e}hōt hā^{,a}dāmāh) is the same as the list of nations in Genesis 10. Had not Genesis 10:32 concluded, "These are the families of the sons of Noah" (mišp^{e}hōt b^{e}nê Nōah)? The promise, then, was universal and limited in its participation only by the response of faith—even as it was so limited for Abraham's participation.

Thus earth's third crisis was again resolved with the gracious word of the same God who dealt justly with sin. We conclude that the theology of this section is a unified development bracketed and advanced by the free word of God. It commences in a word of creative power; it concludes in a word of promise.

The debacles of man's first disobedience, the tyrannical distortion of political power, and the haughty aspiration of unity on a humanistic basis led to the judgment of the Fall, the Flood, and the dispersion of mankind. The theological factors found in each crisis which perpetrated the judgment of God were the thoughts, imaginations, and plans of an evil heart (Gen. 3:5-6; 6:5; 8:21; 9:22; 11:4). But God's salvific word was equal to every default. Alongside the sin-judgment themes came a new word about a seed (3:15), a race among whom God would dwell (9:27), and the blessing of the good news offered to every nation on the face of the earth (12:3).

[8] Samuel Noah Kramer, "The 'Babel of Tongues': A Sumerian Version," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 88(1968): 108-11.

Chapter 6

Provisions in the Promise: Patriarchal Era

A new departure in the divine revelation commenced with Genesis 12. In this new era there was a succession of individuals who now served as God's appointed means of extending His word of blessing to all mankind. Under God's election for service and His call to personal and world-wide blessing, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became hallmarks of a new phase in the accumulated divine blessing.

WORD OF REVELATION

The emerging prominence assigned to the divine word in the prepatriarchal era did not diminish in the patriarchal times; instead, it increased. In fact, it may be noted as one of the distinctive features of Genesis 12-50, for repeatedly the patriarchs were presented as the frequent and immediate recipients of various forms of divine revelation.[1] It is not surprising, then, that the record should treat them as "prophets" (Gen. 20:7; and later in Ps. 105:15), men who had immediate access to the word and ear of the living God.

At crucial junctures in their history, God addressed these men directly in spoken words (Gen. 12:1,4; 13:14; 15:1; 21:12; 22:1) with the introductory formula of "The word of the Lord came to him" or "The Lord said to him." Therefore it was not only Moses to whom God spoke clearly "mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:6-8) but also Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Even more startling was the fact that the Lord Himself appeared (lit., "let Himself be seen" [*wayyērā'*]) by these men in what has subsequently been called a theophany (Gen. 18:1). The reality of the living God's presence underscored the importance and authenticity of His words of promise, comfort, and direction. These appearances, also known as epiphanies, brought man, God, and His purposes for men and women into a very close nexus. All three patriarchs experienced the impact of God's presence on their lives (12:7; 17:1, 18:1; 26:2-5,24; 35:1,7,9). Each appearance of God marked a major development in the progress of revelation as well as in the lives of these men. There He would again "bless" the men, rename them, or send them on a mission which carried with it major consequences for the patriarchs if not for the whole scheme of theology to follow.

Coupled with these theophanies was the manifestation of "the Angel of the Lord" (Gen. 16:7).[2] The identity of this particular Angel appears to be more than just an angelic messenger from God. So frequently He received the respect, worship, and honor reserved only for God; yet He was consistently distinguished from God. His role and appearance are even more obvious in the period of the judges; however, there was no scarcity of references in this period either (16:7-11; 21:17; 22:11-18; 24:7,40; 31:11,13; 32:24-30; 48:15-16). Thus He carried an identity with God; yet He was also sent from Him! To say that the patriarchs regarded Him as equivalent to a Christophany would probably be to claim too much. One thing for sure, He was not the invisible God. And He acted and talked as the Lord. There the matter apparently rested until revelation clarified the enigma.

God also spoke during this era through dreams (*ḥªlôm*, Gen. 20:3; 31:10-11,24; 37:5-10; 40:5-16; 41:1-32) and visions (*maḥªzeh*, *mar'ōt*—15:1; 46:2). The vision was a distinct mode of communicating new knowledge to Abraham in a dramatic setting in which he was aware of a complete panorama of detail (chap. 15). Jacob, likewise, experienced a similar vision urging him to go down to Egypt (chap. 46). Dreams, however, were more widely distributed to

[1]P. V. Premsagar, "Theology of Promise in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Indian Journal of Theology* 23(1974): 114.

[2]See Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), pp. 28-33.

persons such as the Philistine king Abimelech, Jacob's uncle Laban, the jailed Egyptian butler and baker, Pharaoh, and the young inexperienced Joseph. In all such instances the emphasis was on the dream as dream; its interpretation or revelation was not always an integral part of this form of God's address to men and nations.

WORD OF PROMISE

What a premium this era placed on the innovative and beneficial character of that word! Indeed, from the very outset of Genesis 12-50, the accent fell on God's word of blessing and promise. To Abraham this one promise appeared in four stages of development. They are to be found in Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-16; 15:4-21; and 17:4-16 (perhaps 22:15-18 could be added, also).

The content of this promise was basically threefold: a seed, a land, and a blessing to all the nations of the earth. If one could select an emphasis in this series, pride of place would go to the last item. On five separate occasions the patriarchs were designated as a blessing for all nations: Abraham in Genesis 12:3; 18:18; and 22:17-18; Isaac in 26:3-4; and Jacob in 28:13-14. Indeed, world-wide blessing was the whole purpose of the very first statement of the promise in 12:2-3.

Even before any technical vocabulary about entering into a covenant appeared, God promised to enter into a relationship with Abraham and thereby to be and to do something for Abraham that would benefit both him and all the nations of the earth. The writer presented Genesis 12:2-3 as the substance of that word of blessing and promise.

First there were three short clauses addressed to Abraham alone using the Hebrew cohortative form of the verb.

1. "I will make you a great nation."
2. "I will bless you."
3. "I will make your name great."

The third one states something that is almost certainly filled with irony. The quest for a "name," that is to say "renown," "reputation," and even "superiority," had been the driving ambition of those tyrannical kings called "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-4 and the architects of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4. Now God Himself would donate to one man on His own grounds what others had so selfishly sought but failed to attain.

Moreover, the significance of this third clause and the previous two becomes clear for the first time when the next clause is added to

the previous three. No doubt it is to be taken as a result clause. It states the divine purpose and intention for benefiting Abraham so generously: "So that [or in order that] it [or you] may be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). The Hebrew simply reads *weh⁶yēh b⁶rākâh*. Consequently a preliminary goal has been reached in this newly announced relationship. Abraham is to be a great nation, be personally blessed, and receive a great name *"so that* [he] might be a blessing."

But to whom? And how was Abraham to be a blessing? Those questions appear to be answered in the next three clauses. First, the Lord added two more promises in Genesis 12:3, again using the Hebrew cohortative for its verbs.[3]

4. "I will bless those who bless you."
5. "I will curse those who curse you."

Not only did God thereby continue the promise, but He introduced a whole class of people who would respond variously to Abraham. Only then was the grand finale reached. This time the Hebrew verb shifts suddenly to the "perfect tense"[4] in what again can only be a result clause: "So that in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

What a vast sweep was now included in what might have been so trite and so personal an exchange between a single individual and his God! Of course, most competent commentators remain skeptical about the passive rendering of the niphal form of the Hebrew verb,[5] but they fail to see that already the previous result clause had stated as much without specifying exactly to whom Abraham was to be a blessing. The text is so clearly a response to the needs of the swarming multitudes listed in the table of nations (Gen. 10) and the multiplication of Shem's line (chap. 11) that it easily could be classified as one of the first great world-wide missionary texts of Scripture.

Thus far the emphasis was on God's word of blessing. There was a deliberate attempt to connect this new phase of theology with the prepatriarchal emphasis. Five times God had promised His blessing

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[3]E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 325, says that cohortative following the imperative expresses either result or intention. Intention fits here very well.

[4]I am indebted to H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 1:411-14, for many of the observations in this analysis of Genesis 12:2-3.

[5]See our discussion in the introduction and especially our reference to O. T. Allis's article on "The Blessing of Abraham" which contained an irrefutable linguistic case on the passive rendering of this niphal. No one to this day has attempted a response to his evidence.

in the short space of two verses, but Abraham was to be the focus of attention: he was to be a great nation, he was to have a great name, and he was to be blessed by God and by all men. There was no direct reference as yet in Genesis 12:1-3 to a seed or an indwelling in the tents of Abraham as was promised in Genesis 1-11. Nor was there a reference as yet to a covenant *(b'rit)* which God would "cut" *(kārat*—15:18), "give" *(nātan*—17:2), "establish" *(hēqim*—17:7,19,21), or "swear" to *(nisba'*—22:16). As the references show, that was to come later in God's disclosures. Just now it was a relationship with a man which served as a basis for blessing the peoples of the earth. Interestingly enough, the actual realization of a promise such as nationhood would have to wait for several centuries until Israel was delivered from Egypt.

An Heir

When Yahweh appeared to Abraham after the patriarch had arrived at Shechem, that ancient word about a "seed" was again revived and now directed to Abraham (Gen. 12:7). From there on the importance of this gift of a child who would inherit the promises and blessings became one of the dominant themes in the patriarchal narrative. It appeared in 12:7; 13:15,16 (bis); 15:13; 16:10; 17:7,8,9,10,13,16,19; 21:12; 22:17 (bis), 18; 24:7; 26:3,4 (ter), 24; 28:13,14 (bis); 32:12; 35:12; 48:3,4.

Eve had been promised both a "seed" and a male individual—apparently from that "seed." Now the progress of revelation with greater specification elaborated on both the corporate and representative aspects of this promised "seed." It was to encompass so great a number that, in hyperbolic fashion, they would rival the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore. But this seed would also be another "son"—born at first to Abraham, when all hope of his ever having children was lost, and then born to his son Isaac and to Isaac's son Jacob.

A line of successive representative sons of the patriarchs who were regarded as one with the whole group they represented matched the seminal idea already advocated in Genesis 3:15. Furthermore, in the concept of "seed" were the two aspects of the seed as a future *benefit* and the seed as the present *beneficiaries* of God's temporal and spiritual gifts. Consequently, "seed" was always a collective singular noun; never did it appear as a plural noun (e.g., as in "sons"). Thereby the "seed" was marked as a unit, yet with a flexibility of reference: now to the one person, now to the many descendants of that family. This interchange of reference with its implied corporate solidarity was more than a cultural phenomena or

an accident of careless editing; it was part and parcel of its doctrinal intention.

The drama of the possible obstacles and frustrations that could have permanently blocked the divine intention here made up a large part of the historical record in this era. Barrenness seemed to plague doggedly all three wives of the patriarchs: Sarah (Gen. 16:1; 17:15-21); Rebekah (25:21); and Rachel (30:1). Old age was another threat in Abraham's case (17:17; 18:11-13). Egyptian and Philistine monarchs nearly stole the wives away from the patriarchs because of each husband's fearful lying (12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-11). Added to this were the ravaging effects of famine (12:10), filial hostility (32:7-8), and the slaughter of infants conducted by Pharaoh (Exod. 1:22). But through it all the meaning was precisely as God put the question to Sarah: "Is anything too miraculous ['wonderful' or 'difficult,' Heb.—*h'yippālē'*] for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14).

Not even Abraham's attempt to preserve this seed was to count, for the whole life of this child (and each one that followed him) was entirely a gift of God. Therefore when God "tested" *(nissāh)* Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his only son—yes, the very one on whom the whole plan and promise of God rested—he did not demur (Gen. 22:1-10). He feared God (v. 12) and believed that God would "provide" (vv. 8,14—*yir'eh*) so that he *and the lad* would be able to rejoin the party waiting at the base of Mount Moriah (v. 5).

Isaac also was more than a mere foil. He too had a deep stake in what was happening. Yet he learned obedience and trust in this same Lord. Later in his life, when Isaac had selected Esau to receive his blessing, and when everything humanly possible of going wrong was taking place as sons, mother, and father plotted as to whom would be the marked heir to carry the line of the "seed," again Isaac learned that the calling and election of God were not of human intellect or work. God made His selection of His heir apart from the tragic and ridiculous human attempts to upstage the divine plan and free gift.

An Inheritance

The promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed ran through these narratives as the second of the three key themes (Gen. 12:7; 13:15,17; 15:7-8,18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3-5 [pl. "lands"]; 28:13-14; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24). Genesis 15:18 described the borders of this land as extending "from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates." Genesis 17:1-8 emphasized that the land was to be an "everlasting possession." And Genesis 15:1-21 explained that the patriarch would possess the promised word about the land, but he

would merely taste some of the reality of being personally in the land, for the full reality would be delayed until the "fourth generation" when "the iniquity of the Amorites [was] complete" (v. 16).

From the very first moment of God's call to Abraham, He had spoken of this "land" or "country" to which He was sending him (Gen. 12:1). As stated in the earlier chapters, Albrecht Alt was wrong in rejecting the promise of land as being an authentic part of the patriarchal promise. Likewise, Gerhard von Rad had no basis for denying that the entrance into the land by the twelve tribes was not exactly the same vision held by the patriarchs. Only Martin Noth allowed both the land promise and the promise of a seed to be part of the patriarchal religion. Faithfulness to the message of the text in the canonical shape as it has now come down to us demands that both promises be treated as equally authentic and necessary parts of God's message to the patriarchs.

The solemnizing of this offer of land took place in the so-called covenant of pieces (Gen. 15:7-21). Acting on the instructions given by Yahweh, Abraham took various sacrificial animals and divided them into two. After sunset "a smoking furnace and a flaming torch passed between the pieces" (v. 17), and Yahweh made a covenant to give to Abraham and his seed the whole land.

Such a material or temporal blessing was not to be torn apart from the spiritual aspects of God's great promise. Nor was it to be spiritualized or transmuted into some type of heavenly Canaan of which the earthly Canaan was only a model. The text was emphatic, especially chapter 17, that this covenant was to be eternal. However, already in Genesis 13:15 the offer of the land in its entirety was given to Abraham "forever." And when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, this promise was made into "an everlasting covenant" (*berit 'ōlām*—17:7,13,19) and the land was to be for an "everlasting possession" (*ahuzzat 'ōlām*—17:8; also 48:4). The word *'ōlām*, "everlasting," must add something more to the noun it went with, for in the case of covenant there was already a strong idea of perpetuity.[6]

The ancestral promises were fulfilled in the later settlement of the land under Joshua. This, in turn, became a token or pledge of the complete land grant yet to come in the future even as the earlier occupations were simultaneously recognized as "expositions, con-

[6]See the somewhat unsatisfactory studies of E. Jenni, "Das Wort 'ōlām in AT," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84(1952): 197-248; idem, "Time," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), IV:644; James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, Allensons, 1962), p. 69, n. 1.

firmations, and expansions of the promise."[7] Thus even Joshua's settlement of the land did not exhaust the promise of this land as a place chosen by Yahweh for His people. For just as the promise of a son had been enlarged to include in that sonship all the patriarch's descendants, so there was an "overspill" here as well in the land promise.

A Heritage

The third and climactic element in the promise was that Abraham and each successive son of promise were to be the source of blessing; indeed, they were to be the touchstone of blessing to all other peoples. All nations of the earth should be blessed by them, for each was the mediator of life to the nations (of Abraham—12:3; 18:18; 22:17-18; of Isaac—26:3-4; and of Jacob—28:13-14).

The apostle Paul would later point to this phrase and declare that it was the same "gospel" he preached. Simply put, the good news was "in [the promised seed] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gal. 3:8). Thus the embryo of God's good news could be reduced to the linchpin word "blessing." The one who was blessed was now himself to effect blessing of universal proportions. In contrast to the nations who sought a "name" for themselves, God made Abraham a great name *so that* he might be the means of blessing all the nations.

But it might be asked, How were the nations to receive this blessing mediated by Abraham or any of his successive sons? The method must be the same as it was for Abraham. It was by faith: "He believed the Lord, and he added it up for him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

The literal rendering of Genesis 15:6 is simply he believed in Yahweh (*he'emîn baYHWH*). This, of course, was more than a vague intellectual assent to a supreme deity in general. The object of his faith was to be found in the content of the total promise. As such, pride of place may be given to the oldest, most ancient, and most central part of that promise: the person of the man of promise signified by that male descendant who was to come from the seed (3:15). Indeed, when God first met Abraham, the issue of progeny was not specifically included but inferred (12:1-3), for the first clause promised to make Abraham into a great nation. His trust, then, was in the Lord—but particularly in the Lord who had promised.

[7]Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 105.

Once again let us repeat von Orelli's summation of this connection between Abraham and the faith of the nations.

How Abraham himself, in virtue of his special relation to God, was a mediator of blessing to those about him, is shown in Gen. xx.7; that his people in the same way were to convey the divine blessing, the dispensation of God's grace to the whole world, see in Isa. xix.24; Zech. viii.13. In the present passage the import of the brief saying is expounded in [Gen. 12:]3, according to which God's relation to men depends on their attitude to Abraham (cf. xx.7), and the Lord will deal well with those who wish well to him and do homage to the divine grace revealing itself in him; and on the other hand, will make him feel His displeasure who despises and scorns one whom God has blessed. The singular number here is significant. It can only be single hardened sinners who so misunderstand one who is a source of blessing to all about him, as to condemn and hate him, and in him his God. The world, as a whole, will not withhold homage, and will therefore enjoy the benefit of this source of blessing. The latter is implied in the final words [of 12:3] which puts the crown on the promise. ... But whether the subjective act of homage or the objective act of divine blessing lies in the niphal ["be blessed"], exegetes are not agreed. That one involves the other follows, however, from the preceding words.[8]

Since the verb to "believe" in Genesis 15:6 is the Hebrew hiphil form of the verb *'āman* (cf. English "amen"), Geerhardus Vos pointed to the "causative-productive sense"[9] of the verb and to the preposition. Both, in his judgment, showed that <u>faith had its source and its object in the personal Yahweh</u>. For Abraham, it meant he had to renounce all his human efforts to secure the promise and depend on the same divine person who spoke of the future to work in the present and the future to accomplish what He said He would do. Thus Abraham possessed the promises of God as yet unrealized when he possessed the God of the promises and His trustworthy word.

Some will object to an unconditional construction being laid over the Abrahamic promises. Five passages are often cited as examples of stipulations placed on Abraham: Genesis 12:1; 17:1,9-14; 22:16; 26:5.

The first is the imperative, "Get thee out from your country, your kindred, and your father's house to a land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). This imperative is followed by two imperfects and then a series of cohortative imperfects in verses 2-3. But does such a command amount to a formal condition on the divine intention to bless? While admitting that there is a certain conditional element present, Cleon Rogers correctly demonstrated that the accent of the passage was on the <u>cohortatives which emphasized intentionality rather than obligation</u> and that this type of construction occurs in Genesis 45:18 (where the stress was on what Joseph intended to do for his brothers) or Genesis 30:28 (what Laban intended to do for Jacob) and Genesis 27:3; 1 Samuel 14:12; 28:22; 2 Samuel 14:7.[10] The summons to "go," then, was an invitation to receive the gift of promise by faith.[11]

Genesis 17:1-2 would appear at first to impose another condition: "Walk before Me and be blameless and I will make My covenant between Me and thee." Once more the sequence was two imperatives followed by two cohortative imperfects. Therefore, what was true of 12:1-3 is applicable here also. Furthermore, the promise had already been repeated several times prior to this time in 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17; 15:7-21; and 16:10. Consequently, some expositors have argued that the force of the verb translated "I will make" (*we'ett*enâh*) does not mean "to set up" but "to put into force" or "make operative the one that is in force."[12] The identical argument would apply for 17:9-14 where circumcision might, at first blush, seem like another condition on the promise. But verse 11 completely settled the argument: circumcision was only a "sign" of the covenant, not its condition.

The last two passages are more difficult. In Genesis 22:16-18 Abraham was told, "Because *(kî ya'an 'ašer)* you have done this [been willing to offer your son] ..., I will bless you ... because *('ēqeb 'ašer)* you obeyed My voice." In Genesis 26:5 the blessing is repeated to Isaac "because *('ēqeb 'ašer)* Abraham obeyed My voice

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[8]C. von Orelli, *The Old Testament Prophecy of the Consummation of God's Kingdom Traced in Its Historical Development*, trans. J. J. Banks (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), p. 107.

[9]Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 98. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 1:171, stressed that the object of faith was "something in the future," God's "plan for history (Gen. xv. 5)," and this is what Abraham believed and "'made himself secure' in."

[10]Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and its Historical Setting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127(1970): 252 and n. 61.

[11]Hans Walter Wolff also agrees: Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: Knox Press, 1975), p. 47.

[12]Leupold, *Genesis*, 1:514; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 25 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 1:223.

and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." In our judgment, the conditionality was not attached to the promise but only to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises. If the condition of faith was not evident, then the patriarch would become a mere transmitter of the blessing without personally inheriting any of its gifts directly. Such faith must be evident also in an obedience that sprang from faith. Certainly the promise was not initiated in either chapter 22 or 26; that had long since been settled. But each chapter did have a sensitive moment of testing or transition. Further, the election of God had been with a purpose of not only blessing Abraham and the nation (18:18) but also with a purpose of charging him and his household to "maintain the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice in order that (*l°ma'an*) the Lord might bring on Abraham what He has promised him" (v. 19).

The connection is undeniable. The duty of obedience (law, if you wish) was intimately tied up with promise as a desired sequel. Therefore, the transition to the coming time of Mosaic law should not be all that difficult for any who had really adequately listened to the full revelation of the promise in the patriarchal era.

WORD OF ASSURANCE

Throughout the patriarchal narratives one more theme rang out as another part of the blessing of the promise. It was simply God's pledge: "I will be with you."

Actually, the first time God's presence with men was explicitly mentioned was where the writer commented that God was "with" (*'et*) Hagar's son Ishmael (Gen. 21:20). Then it appeared as a word in the Philistine mouths of Abimelech and Phicol to Abraham: "God is with (*'im*) you in all that you do" (21:22) and later to Isaac: "We can certainly see that the Lord is with (*'im*) you" (26:28).

Out of 104 examples of this formula of the divine presence employing the two Hebrew prepositions translated "with" (*'et* and *'im*) in the OT, 14 examples appear in the Isaac and Jacob narratives of God's assurance.[13] God appeared to Isaac with the comforting words, "Fear not, for I am with (*'ēt*) you" (26:24). Or as He said it in an earlier appearance, "Sojourn in this land, I will be with (*'im*) you"

(26:3). For Jacob, it was a dream of a ladder with God's assurance as he set out for Haran: "Behold, I am with (*'im*) you" (28:15).

To this Jacob vowed, "If God will be with (*'im*) me, and will protect me in the way I go, . . . then the Lord will be my God" (Gen. 28:20-21). Again, when Jacob was about to return to Canaan, the Lord repeated His earlier promise: "I will be with (*'im*) you" (31:3). Accordingly, Jacob repeated to Laban that the Lord had indeed been with (*'im*) him (31:5; 35:3). Jacob's son, Joseph, likewise experienced that same divine presence of God (39:2,3,21,23).[14] As Jacob had been favored and blessed by the God who knew of his problems with a scheming Laban, so Joseph was likewise rescued and blessed by the same Lord who followed his changing situation in Egypt.

Yahweh's active presence manifested His character, power, and ability to fulfill the repeated word of promise. It was preeminently a word of personal relationship. The divine presence, of course, had been felt by Abraham before the words were put into a promise-theology formula. For example, the victory Abraham won over Chedorlaomer in Genesis 14:13-24 was an illustration of this fact even if the word was not present. Similarly, so was the intimacy of Abraham's cross-examination of God over His justice in dealing with Sodom and Gomorrah (18:23-33); the Judge of the whole earth would do what was right. Had He not been Abraham's "shield" and "exceeding great reward" (15:1)?

Abraham received the first part of what was to become the oft-repeated tripartite formula of the promise. For now, it was the divine promise: "I will be a God to you and to your seed" (Gen. 17:7). The sovereign God of all the universe would now condescend and call Himself the God of Abraham and his seed. Therein lies the essence of their personal relationship. No wonder James remarked that Abraham was "called the Friend of God" (James 2:23). Their relationship was one of love (18:19), action (19:29), and blessing in all that Abraham did (21:22).

RULER OF PROMISE

As the blessing Abraham received in Genesis 12:1-3; 15; and 17 was transferred to Isaac in 26:3-6 and then to Jacob in a dream at Bethel in 28:13-14 and especially at Paddan-Aram (35:9-12; cf. 46:1-4), so Judah, the fourth son of the patriarch, received it from Jacob's blessing in 49:8-12.

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[13]Horst D. Preuss, "*'eth, 'im,*" *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren; trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1974–) 1:449-63, especially 456.

[14]Charles T. Fritsch, "God Was With Him: A Theological Study of the Joseph Narrative," *Interpretation* 9(1955): 21-34.

True, Joseph did receive a double portion in the inheritance since his two sons were in a sense adopted by Jacob (cf. *bᵉkōrāt* of 1 Chron. 5:1), but Judah became the "leader" (*nāgid*) among his brethren. The oldest son, Reuben, lost his birthright because he dishonored his father's marriage bed (Gen. 35:22). Simeon and Levi, Jacob's second and third sons, were bypassed because of their outrageous revenge on the Shechemites (34:13-29). So the mantle of leadership fell to Judah.

As Isaac had blessed Jacob in Genesis 27:29, so Jacob now transmitted the same supremacy over his brothers to Judah in 49:8. His prowess would make him a princely tribe, and he would maintain his superiority over his foes. His emblem would be the regal lion. To him are given the scepter (*šēbeṭ*) and the ruler's staff (*mᵉḥōqēq*—49:10).

But what is the meaning of the phrase "until Shiloh comes" (*'ad kî yābō' šîlōh*)? Again, the opinion of von Orelli merits careful attention:

> The context on one hand, the oldest authorities in respect of reading on the other, conduct us to our translation. *Šᵉlloh* was the reading handed down from antiquity, and the LXX rendered this neutrally: *heōs 'ean 'elthē ta apokeimena autō* [until there come the things stored up for him]. Instead of this abstract neuter subject we take the personal subject dominating everywhere here and render: *until he come into that which belongs to him*, therefore *into his own*, his possession described on the sequel. Cf. especially the blessing of Moses on Judah, Deut. xxxiii. 7: *wᵉ'el 'ammô tᵉbi' ennû* ["to his people bring him"]. As champion of the other tribes, he will display untiring energy until he has won his territory without curtailment; and then not merely will the tribes of Israel do homage to him but other nations also will bow to his rule.[15]

Of the last phrase of Genesis 49:10, viz., "he shall take to him the peoples" (*wᵉlô yiqqᵉhat 'ammîm*), he continued:

> [peoples] cannot apply to the Israelites merely, . . . but must refer to the more general national rule, which according to xxvii. 29 is part of Jacob's heritage, and will be Judah's special portion.[16]

For Ezekiel or later Jewish and Christian interpreters to regard this as another addition to the doctrine of the seed to come is

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[15]Von Orelli, *Prophecy*, pp. 121-22. The Lucianic and Origenic recensions of the LXX read *heōs an elthē apokeitai*, "until he, to whom it is reserved, comes."

[16]Ibid. See W. Gesenius, *Hebraisches und Aramaisches Handwörterbuch*, 17th ed., F. Buhl, ed. (Leipzig, 1921), p. 596ᵇ. He concluded that *'ammîm* is never used of Israel exclusively; it refers to all peoples or people outside Israel.

therefore not unwarranted. Neither was Ezekiel's allusion in 21:27, "until He comes whose right it is, to Him I will give it," out of bounds either.[17] The Man of promise would be overwhelmingly successful; He would reign over all the peoples of the earth because it was His right and destiny so to do. Furthermore, He would originate from the tribe of Judah in Israel!

GOD OF PROMISE

In the patriarchal narratives, there was a series of names for God. He was El Olam, "the Everlasting God" (Gen. 21:33); El Elyon, "the Most High God" (14:18-20,22), or Yahweh Yireh, "Yahweh will provide" (22:14). But the most frequent and important name was El Shaddai, usually translated "God Almighty" (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; cf. also 49:25—*'et* Shaddai).

In the book of Job, El Shaddai is used some thirty times beginning with Job 5:17. This is not unexpected, for the prologue and epilogue of that book have such clear credentials for placing the events of Job in the patriarchal era. Some of these indicators are: (1) the wealth of Job puts him in the class of such big cattle owners (Job 1:3,10) as was true also of Isaac (Gen. 26:13-14; cf. 30:29-30); (2) his officiating at sacrifices on behalf of his children (Job 1:5; 42:8) can likewise only be compared to the patriarchal or prepatriarchal age; (3) the currency in use (*qᵉśîṭâh*—Job 42:11) is the same as mentioned in Jacob's time (Gen. 33:19; cf. Josh. 24:32); (4) the longevity of Job (over 140 years, or five generations, Job. 42:16) is comparable to Joseph's 110 years and three generations (Gen. 50:23); and (5) Job's death (42:17) is described in exactly the same terms as that of Abraham (25:8) and Isaac (35:29).

Regardless of what scholars ultimately decide the meaning of

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[17]For further study, cf. W. L. Moran, "Genesis 49:10 and its use in Ezekiel 21:32," *Biblica* 39(1958): 405-25. He would vocalize "Shiloh" as *šay* and *lôh* and change *yābō'* to the hiphil *yûbā'*, "until tribute is brought to him and his is the obedience of the people." Moran rightly rejects the reading *šilu(m)* as an alleged Akkadian cognate meaning "Prince, ruler, king" (which does not occur in Akkadian, 405-409) and the reading of the City Shiloh (which is never spelled *šylh* in Hebrew, 410-11), but he also rejects *šellō* (409-10,14-16) because the unexpressed subject cannot be "the staff" or "the septer" since this ruins the parallelism. (Orelli, of course, took the personal subject dominating the whole section.) Further, it should have been written *šellō hô'* and *še* as a relative pronoun is very improbable since that is a feature of the northern dialect. (In response to these last two problems, we call attention to the parallel between *wᵉlô* and *šiloh* in the two parallel lines and to the use of *še* in contexts not necessarily northern or late.)

Shaddai is (whether "nourisher" or "God of the Mountain"),[18] the pattern of usage is clear in the six patriarchal references and most of Job's more than thirty references. This name stressed the might and power of God; thus the LXX rendered it in Job as *ho pantokrátōr*, the "All-Ruler" or "Almighty." As Gerhardus Vos stated it,[19] El Shaddai emphasized the supernatural work of His grace. As He overpowered nature and forced her to forward His plan of salvation, El Shaddai indicated God's ability to master nature. Thereby it linked together His work in Creation and now His overpowering work in history to effect His plan.

Outside of these six references in Genesis and the thirty-one references in Job, this divine name appears three other places in the Pentateuch (Exod. 6:3; Num. 24:4,16), four times in the Prophets (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15; Ezek. 1:24; 10:5), and in Psalms (68:15 [Heb.]; 91:1) and Ruth (1:20-21). Together they fit the general tenor of the name and its use in the patriarchal era; God is omnipotent and a great Sovereign who can and will act on behalf of those whom He loves and who are called according to His purpose and plan.

Thus the theology of this section was intertwined around that *word* from on high, its *blessing* to a chosen seed, and the *assurance* of the divine presence that guaranteed the certainty of the promised heir, inheritance, and heritage or even the present success of the patriarchs. It was all God's word of encouragement.

So blessed were these men that their benefits overflowed to their neighbors. Hence Laban claimed that he was blessed of Yahweh on account of his proximity to Jacob (Gen. 30:27,30). In the same way Pharaoh was blessed because of his proximity to Joseph (39:5).

Perhaps this same concept of physical proximity was involved in the act of communicating blessing from father to son as H. Mowvley suggested.[20] Rather than locating the root for the verb to bless (*brk*) as Gesenius did in the root *prq*, "to break," i.e., the bending of or breaking of one's knees when homage or thanks is given, he followed J. Pedersen, von Rad, and Procksch who translate the verb *bārak* as "to place on the knees of." (Joseph may have placed his

children on Jacob's knees—Genesis 48.) Thus Isaac touched and kissed Jacob as he imparted his blessing to him (Gen. 27:27). So Laban kissed his grandchildren and blessed them (31:55). Likewise, the one who wrestled with Jacob touched the hollow of his thigh (32:25-32).

Just as important as the act, however, was the word of blessing itself. The blessing was many things: a prediction, the gift itself resulting from blessing (Gen. 33:11), a capacity given by God to ensure the fulfillment of the promise (17:16; 24:60), the reward of prosperity (15:1), the peace of the Lord (26:29), and nothing less than the presence of God Himself (26:3,28).[21]

The patriarchs' confidence that they survived death, even if the actual method or means was left undiscussed, appeared with the other blessings of the age. Abraham believed that the almighty God could effect the deliverance of his son from death itself in Genesis 22. He had as much a right to this view as Gilgamesh had for his friend Enkidu or the myth of Tammuz had for dead vegetation. Therefore, the patriarchal text always carefully distinguished the fact that each patriarch was "gathered to his people" from the act of burial in the "grave" (Gen. 25:8-9; 35:29; 37:35; 49:29,31,33). Neither was their relationship to God or His continuing association with them canceled after death, for He repeatedly identified Himself, the living personal God, as the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exod. 3:6; cf. Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37).[22] No wonder the psalmist confidently expressed the fact that men continued to enjoy fellowship with God beyond the grave (Pss. 16:10; 49:15; 73:24). Likewise, Job argued in 14:14 that man enjoyed the same prospect of "sprouting forth" again as did the felled tree (Job. 14:7).[23]

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[18]From Ugaritic *tdy*, "mountains," or from *šd*, "breast"; contrast *śd*, "field."

[19]Vos, *Theology*, pp. 95-96. He noted the connection in Isaiah 13:6 and Joel 1:15 between shaddai and the Hebrew verb *šādad*, "to overpower, destroy." Cf. Frank M. Cross, "Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs," *Harvard Theological Review* 55(1962): 244-50.

[20]H. Mowvley, "The Concept and Content of 'Blessing' in the Old Testament," *Bible Translator* 16(1965): 74-80.

[21]Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[22]For fuller discussion, see James Orr, *Christian View of God and the World* appendix to lecture V (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), pp. 200-210; Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 1:343-59.

[23]See our full discussion in the chapter on wisdom theology.

nothing but an announcement of his arrival and his great wealth (cf. 33¹²ff.) The shepherd, with all his success, is at the mercy of the fierce marauder who was to 'live by his sword' (27⁴⁰).—**7.** The messengers return with the ominous news that Esau is already on the march with 400 men. How he was ready to strike so far north of his own territory is a difficulty (see p. 415).—**8, 9.** Jacob's first resource is to divide his company into *two camps*, in the hope that one might escape while the other was being captured. The arrangement is perhaps adverted to in 33⁸.—**10-13.** Jacob's prayer, consisting of an invocation (¹⁰), thanksgiving (¹¹), petition (¹²), and appeal to the divine faithfulness (¹³), is a classic model of OT devotion (Gu.); though the element of confession, so prominent in later supplications, is significantly absent. — **12.** *mother with* (or *on*) *children*] Hos. 10¹⁴; cf. Dt. 22⁶. A popular saying,—the mother conceived as bending over the children to protect them (Tu.).—**14a.** *spent that night there*] i.e., at Maḥanaim (v.²²). We may suppose (with We. Gu.) that an explicit etymology, based on the 'two camps' (vv.⁸·¹¹), preceded or followed this clause.

Vv.¹⁰⁻¹³ appear to be one of the later expansions of the Yahwistic narrative, akin to 13¹⁴⁻¹⁷ 22¹⁵⁻¹⁸ 26³ᵇ⁻⁵ 28¹⁴. They can be removed without loss of continuity, ¹⁴ᵃ being a natural continuation of ⁹. The insertion gives an interpretation to the 'two camps' at variance with the primary motive of the division (v.⁹); and its spirit is different from that of the narrative in which it is embedded. Comp. also חול הים with 22¹⁷ לא יספר מרב with 16¹⁰ 22¹⁷. See Gu. 316.

14b-22. The present for Esau (E).—14. *a present*] Not

§ 49 c.—**8.** [וַיֵּצֶר] √ צרר intrans.='be cramped'; on the form, cf. G-K. § 67 p.—[והגמלים] 𝔊ᴬ om. and transp.—ואת־הבקר ואת־הצאן [שני מחנות] That this implies an etymology of Maḥanaim, and that J located the incident there, cannot reasonably be doubted (as by Ho.). The name is obviously regarded as a dual (in contrast to v.³), showing that the current pronunciation is very ancient (Di.).—**9.** [האחת גג האחר] (masc.), which is demanded by the context, as well as by prevailing usage (Albrecht, *ZATW*, xvi. 52).—**11.** [קטנתי מן] 'too insignificant for'; G-K. § 133 c.—[הירדן הזה] The writer apparently locates Maḥanaim in the vicinity of the Jordan; but the allusion, in an editorial passage, has perhaps no great topographical importance.

14. [מן־הבא] Art. with ptcp. (not pf.); see G-K. § 138 k; Dri. *Sam.*

'tribute' (as often) in acknowledgment of vassalage, but (as 43¹¹, 2 Ki. 8ˢᶠ·) a gift to win favour.—**17-20.** By arranging the cattle in successive droves following at considerable intervals, Jacob hopes to wear out Esau's resentment by a series of surprises. The plan has nothing in common with the two 'camps' of v.⁸ᶠ· in J. — **21a.** A repetition of ¹⁹ᵇ: Jacob lays stress on this point, because the effect would obviously be weakened if a garrulous servant were to let out the secret that other presents were to follow.—**21b.** *Let me pacify him*] lit. 'cover' (or 'wipe clean') his face,—the same figure, though in different language, as 20¹⁶. On כפר, see *OTJC²*, 381; *DB*, iv. 128 f.—*see his face*] 'obtain access to his presence': cf. 43³·⁵ 44²³·²⁶, Ex. 10²⁸, 2 Sa. 14²⁴·²⁸·³², 2 Ki. 25¹⁹, Est. 1¹⁴. The phrase is thought to convey an allusion to *Pĕnû'ēl* (Gu.); see on 33¹⁰.—**22.** *spent . . . camp* (בּמּחנה)] cf. ¹⁴ᵃ. We. (*Comp.²* 46) renders 'in Maḥaneh' (*i.e.* Maḥanaim), but the change is hardly justified.

23-33. The wrestling at Peniel (JE).—23, 24. The crossing of the Jabbok. The *Yabbōk* is now almost univers-

57 f.—[מנחה] see on 4³.—**17.** רוּחַ (Est. 4¹⁴ †)] √ רוח, 'be wide' (1 Sa. 16²³, Jb. 32²⁰).—**18.** On the forms יִשַׁשְׁכָּר (Ben Napht.), יִשָּׂשׁכָר (Ben Asher), see G-K. §§ 9 v, 10 g (c), 60 b, [and B.-D., *Gen.* p. 85]; and on שאל, § 64 f.—**20.** [ויבו] 𝔊 +τῷ πρώτῳ.—[כמּנחם] irreg. inf. for כּמּנחם (G-K. §§ 74 h, 93 q).—**21.** [יעקב] 𝔞𝔩 𝔊𝔗ᴼᴶ +את.

23-33. The analysis of the passage is beset by insurmountable difficulties. While most recognise doublets in ²³ᶠ· (*v.s.*), ²⁵⁻³³ have generally been regarded as a unity, being assigned to J by We. Kue. Corn. KS. Dri. al.; but by Di. to E. In the view of more recent critics, both J and E are represented, though there is the utmost variety of opinion in regard to details. In the notes above, *possible* variants have been pointed out in ²⁶ᵃ ‖ ²⁶ᵇ (the laming of the thigh) and ²⁸·²⁹ ‖ ³⁰ (the name and the blessing); to these may be added the still more doubtful case ³¹ ‖ ³² (Peniel, Penuel). As showing traces of more primitive conceptions, ²⁶ᵃ and ³⁰ would naturally go together, and also ²⁷ for the same reason. Since J prefers the name Israel in the subsequent history, there is a slight presumption that ²⁸ᶠ· belong to him; and the אלהים of ³¹ points (though not decisively) to E. Thus we should obtain, for E: ²⁶ᵃ·²⁷·³⁰·³¹; leaving for J: ²⁶ᵇ·²⁸·²⁹·³²; v.³³ may be a gloss. The result corresponds nearly, so far as it goes, with Gu.'s (318 f.). The reader may compare the investigations of Ho. (209 f.), Procksch (32), Meyer (*INS*, 57 f.).—**23.** [ההוא גג בלילה הוא] as 19³³ 30¹⁶.—יבּק (גג היבּק) (Nu. 21²⁴, Dt. 2³⁷ 3¹⁶, Jos. 12², Ju. 11¹³·²²†) is naturally explained as the 'gurgler,' from √ בקק (Ar. *bakka*), the resemblance to אבק (v.²⁵) being, of course, a popular word-play.—**24b.** Insert על־ before

ally, and no doubt correctly, identified with the *Nahr es-Zerḳā* (Blue River), whose middle course separates Ǧebel ʿAǧlūn from eḷ-Belḳā, and which flows into the Jordan about 25 m. N of the Dead Sea. See Smend, *ZATW*, 1902, 137 ff. ; and the descriptions in Riehm, *Hwb.*[2] 665 ; Smith, *HG*, 583–5.— The *ford* referred to cannot be determined ; that of *Muḥādat en-Nuṣrānīyeh*, where the road from Ǧeraš to es-Salt crosses the deep narrow gorge which cleaves the mountains of Gilead, as described by Thomson (*LB*, iii. 583 ff.) and Tristram (*Land of Israel*[3], 549), supplies a more fitting background for the weird struggle about to be narrated than the one in the Jordan valley ; but on the difficulties of this identification, see Dri. *ET*, xiii. 459.

The passage of the river seems to be twice described, 24a and 24b being apparently doublets. The former continues 23a, which belongs to J (שחש). Following this clue, we may divide thus : 23a. 24a = J ; 23b. 24b = E (so Gu.). While E implies that Jacob crossed with his company, the account of J is consistent with the statement of 25a, that after sending the others across he himself was 'left alone.' On any view the action is somewhat perplexing. To cross a ford by night, with flocks, etc., was a dangerous operation, only to be explained by apprehension of an attack from Esau (We.). But Esau is represented as advancing from the south ; and Jacob is in haste to put his people and possessions on that side of the river on which they were exposed to attack. Either the narrative is defective at this point, or it is written without a clear conception of the actual circumstances.

25. *a man wrestled with him till the appearing of the dawn*] —Only later does Jacob discover that his unknown antagonist is a god in human form (cf. 18[2] 19[5]).—The rare word (*v.i.*) for 'wrestle' (אבק) is chosen because of the assonance with יבק.—**26a.** *he saw that he prevailed not*] The ambiguity of the subject extends to the next clause, and leaves two interpretations open (*v.i.*).—*struck the socket of his thigh*] putting it out of joint.—**26b.** *the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him.*

The dislocation of the thigh seems to be twice recorded (see KS. *An.* 159), and it is highly probable that the two halves of the v. come from

אשר (𝔊𝔖𝔙).—**25.** ויאבק] A vb. used only here and v.[26], distinct from NH נאבק, 'make oneself dusty,' and very probably a modification of חבק, 'clasp' (De. Di.).—**26.** יקתע] √ יקע, lit. 'be rent away' (cf. Jer. 6[8]) :

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different sources. In 26a it is a stratagem resorted to by a wrestler unable to gain the advantage by ordinary means (like the trick of Ulysses in *Il.* xxiii. 725 ff.) ; in 26b it is an accident which happens to Jacob in the course of the struggle. It has even been suggested that in the original legend the subj. of 26a was Jacob—that it was he who disabled his antagonist in the manner described (Ho. Gu. Che. : see Müller, *AE*, 163[1] ; Luther, *ZATW*, xxi. 65 ff. ; Meyer, *INS*, 57). It is possible (though certainly not probable) that this was the view of the document (J or E) to which 26a belongs, and that it underlies Hos. 12[5].

27. *Let me go, for the dawn is breaking*] Comp. Plautus, *Amphitr.* 532 f., where Jupiter says : "Cur me tenes ? Tempus est : exire ex urbe priusquam lucescat volo." It is a survival of the wide-spread belief in spirits of the night which must vanish at dawn (*Hamlet*, Act 1. Sc. i.) ; and as such, a proof of the extreme antiquity of the legend.—But the request reveals to Jacob the superhuman character of his adversary, and he resolves to hold him fast till he has extorted a blessing from him.—**28, 29.** Here the blessing is imparted in the form of a new name conferred on Jacob in memory of this crowning struggle of his life.—*thou hast striven with God*] Yisrā'ēl, probably = 'God strives' (*v.i.*), is interpreted as 'Striver with God' ; cf. a similar transformation of ירבעל ('Baal contends') in Ju. 6[32]. Such a name is a true 'blessing,' as a pledge of victory and success to the nation which bears it.—*and with men*] This can hardly refer merely to the contests with Laban and Esau ; it points rather to the existence of a fuller body of legend, in which Jacob figured as the hero of many combats, culminating

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𝔊 ἐνάρκησεν, 𝔖 ܐܠܡ, 𝔙 *emarcuit*, 𝔗ᴼ יגי ('gave way'),—all conjectural.— **29.** ישראל] A name of the same type as ישמעאל, ירחמאל, etc., with some such meaning as 'God strives' or 'Let God strive' ; originally (it has been suggested) a war-cry which passed into a proper name (see Steuernagel, *Einw.* 61). The vb. שרה, however, only occurs in connexion with this incident (Ho. 12[4. 5], where read ישר), and in the personal name שריה ; and its real meaning is uncertain. If it be the Heb. equivalent of Ar. *šariya*, Dri. argues that it must mean 'persist' or 'persevere' rather than 'strive' (*DB*, ii. 530), which hardly yields a suitable idea. Some take it as a by-form of שרר, either in a denominative sense ('rule,' from שר, prince), or in its assumed primary significance 'shine forth' (Ass. *šarāru* : see Vollers, *ARW*, ix. 184). Some doubt has even been thrown on the traditional Heb. pronunciation by the form *Ysir'r*, found on an inscr. of Merneptah (Steindorff, *ZATW*, xvi. 330 ff.), with which we may compare

in this successful struggle with deity. — **30.** Jacob vainly
endeavours to extort a disclosure of the name of his anta-
gonist. This is possibly an older variant of [28f.], belonging
to a primitive phase of thought, where he who possesses the
true name of a god can dispose of the power of its bearer
(Che. *TBI*, 401[1]; *DB*, v. 640). For the concealment of the
name, cf. Ju. 13[18] (the same words). — Gu. thinks that
in the original narrative the name of the wrestler was
actually revealed. — **31.** *Pĕnî'ēl*] 'Face of God' (*v.i.*). The
name is derived from an incidental feature of the experience:
that Jacob had seen "God *face to face*" (Ex. 33[11], Dt. 34[10]),
and yet lived (see on 16[13]). — The site of Peniel is unknown:
see Dri. *ET*, xiii. 457 ff., and *Gen.* 300 ff. — **32.** *limping on
his thigh*] in consequence of the injury he had received ([26b]).
That he bore the hurt to his death, as a memorial of the
conflict, is a gratuitous addition to the narrative. — **33.** The
food-taboo here mentioned is nowhere else referred to in
OT; and the Mishnic prohibition (*Ḥullin*, 7) is probably
dependent on this passage. Rob. Sm. explains it from the
sacredness of the thigh as a seat of life (*RS²*, 380[1]);* and

Ass. *Sir-lai* (=ישראל) (see Kittel, *SBOT Chronicles*, p. 58). Comp. also
Che. *TBI*, 404.—שרית] ᵍ ἐνίσχυσας, Aq. ἦρξας, Σ. ἤρξω, 𝔙 *fortis fuisti*, 𝔖
‎ܫܪ, 𝔗ᵒ רב את.—**31.** [פניאל] ᵍ Εἶδος θεοῦ, 𝔐𝔖Ɛ𝔙𝔖 read פנואל as v.[32].
The formal difference arises from the old case-endings of gen. and nom.
(G-K. § 90*o*). Strabo (XVI. ii. 16, 18) mentions a Phœnician pro-
montory near Tripolis called Θεοῦ πρόσωπον : it is not improbable that
in both cases the name is derived from a fancied resemblance to a face.
—**33.** [גיד הנשה] נשה is to be explained by Ar. *nasᵃⁿ* (for *nasayᵘⁿ*), which
means the *nervus ischiadicus*, or the thigh in which it is found (Ges.
Th. 921 f.). The question remains whether גיד denotes here a nerve,
an artery, a sinew, or a muscle ; the first seems by far the most pro-
bable. So it seems to have been understood by 𝔖 (ܓܝܕܐ ܕܢܫܝܐ
=tetanus-nerve), and by ᵍ and 𝔙, which appear to have connected
נשה with the vb. for 'forget' (Gr.-Venet, τὸ νεῦρον τὸ ἐπιλελησμένον !).
The modern Jewish restriction applies, according to De., to the "Span-
nader, d. h. die innere Ader des sogen. Hinterviertels mit Einschluss
der äusseren und der Verästelungen beider."

* "The nature of the lameness produced by injury to the sinew of the
thigh socket is explained by the Arabic lexx., *s.v. ḥārifat* ; the man
can only walk on the tips of his toes. This seems to have been a
common affection, for poetical metaphors are taken from it."

We. (*Heid.* 168[3]) calls attention to a trace of it in ancient
Arabia. For primitive parallels, see Frazer, *Golden Bough*,
ii. 419 ff., *Folklore in OT*, 142 f. The precise meaning of
גיד הנשה is uncertain (*v.i.*).

In its fundamental conception the struggle at Peniel is not a dream
or vision like that which came to Jacob at Bethel; nor is it an allegory
of the spiritual life, symbolising the inward travail of a soul helpless
before some overhanging crisis of its destiny. It is a real physical en-
counter which is described, in which Jacob measures his strength and
skill against a divine antagonist, and 'prevails,' though at the cost of
a bodily injury. No more boldly anthropomorphic narrative is found in
Genesis ; and unless we shut our eyes to some of its salient features, we
must resign the attempt to translate it wholly into terms of religious
experience. We have to do with a legend, originating at a low level of
religion, in process of accommodation to the purer ideas of revealed
religion ; and its history may have been somewhat as follows: (1) We
begin with the fact of a hand-to-hand conflict between a god and a man.
A similar idea appears in Ex. 4[24ff.], where we read that Yahwe met Moses
and 'sought to kill him.' In the present passage the god was probably
not Yahwe originally, but a local deity, a night-spirit who fears the
dawn and refuses to disclose his name. Dr. Frazer has pointed out
that such stories as this are associated with water-spirits, and cites
many primitive customs (*Folklore*, 136 ff.) which seem to rest on the belief
that a river resents being crossed, and drowns many who attempt it.
He hazards the conjecture that the original deity of this passage was
the spirit of the Jabbok ; in which case the word-play between יבק and
אבק may have greater significance than appears on the surface. (2) Like
many patriarchal theophanies, the narrative accounts for the foundation
of a sanctuary—that of Peniel. Of the cultus at Peniel we know nothing ;
and there is very little in the story that can be supposed to bear upon it,
unless we assume, with Gu. and others, that the limping on the thigh
refers to a ritual dance regularly observed there (cf. 1 Ki. 18[26]).* (3) By
J and E the story was incorporated in the national epos as part of the
history of Jacob. The God who wrestles with the patriarch is Yahwe ;
and how far the wrestling was understood as a literal fact remains un-
certain. To these writers the main interest lies in the origin of the name
Israel, and the blessing bestowed on the nation in the person of its
ancestor. (4) A still more refined interpretation is found, it seems to
me, in Ho. 12[4.5]: 'In the womb he overreached his brother ; and in his
prime he strove with God. He strove (שרה) with the Angel and pre-
vailed ; he wept and made supplication to him.' The substitution of the
Angel of Yahwe for the divine Being Himself shows increasing sensitive-
ness to anthropomorphism ; and the last line appears to mark an advance
in the spiritualising of the incident, the subject being not the Angel (as
Gu. and others hold), but Jacob, whose 'prevailing' thus becomes that
of importunate prayer. — We may note in a word Steuernagel's ethno-

* But see footnote on p. 410 above.

logical interpretation. He considers the wrestling to
symbolize a victory of the invading Israelites over
the inhabitants of Up. Gilead. The change of the name
reflected the fact that the new nation (Israel) arose from the
fusion of the Jacob & the Rachel tribes (Einw. 61 f.)

journey. Lastly, it would seem an act of cowardice if Jacob had sent his wives and children across the brook, which was a protection against the danger, while he himself remained behind. [Still, the narrative plainly implies that Jacob remained on the north of the Jabbok. And whatever courage may have prompted to do, as to protect his own with his life, Jacob was dimly conscious that the crisis of his life was now upon him, and that he must be alone with God. It was not the want of courage, but the sense that help must come from God, and the working of his faith which led him to cling to the arm of God, which kept him here for the prayer and struggle and victory.—A. G.]—**And there wrestled a man with him.**—Now, when he supposed everything arranged, the greatest difficulty meets him. The unmeasured homage, with which he thought to reconcile Esau, touches the violation or at least puts in peril the promise which was given to him. Moreover, he has not only injured Esau, but offended God (Elohim), who is the God of Esau, and will not suffer him to be injured with impunity.—**There wrestled a man.**—This archaic form occurs only here and in vers. 25 and 26. Dietrich traces it to the idea of "struggling or freeing oneself from;" Delitzsch to פבק, to limit, to touch each other closely, member to member. We prefer the reference to the kindred form, אבק, to hold fast, to adhere firmly, etc. Hithpael, to hold to oneself. There seems to be an allusion in the word to the name Jabbok (Knobel), or rather, the brook derives its name from this struggle, יבק, instead of יאבק (Keil). An older derivation traces the word, "to dust," to raise dust in the struggle. The question arises whether the sense of the word here is, that the nameless man came upon Jacob, as if he had been his enemy, or that Jacob seized the man, as he appeared to him, and held him fast, while he strives to free himself from the grasp. According to ver. 27, the last sense is the true one. If we take the other supposition, we must conceive that Jacob, during the night-wrestling, recognized as a friend the man who came upon him as an enemy. Still there is no intimation of a hostile attack. The passage in Hosea xii. 4, also supports the idea that Jacob held fast the mysterious man, and not vice versâ. "He took his brother by the heel in the womb—and by his strength he had power with God—he had power over the angel and prevailed—he wept and made supplication unto him—he found him in Bethel."—**And when he saw that he prevailed not against him.**—That is, ver. 27, he could not compel him to let him go.—**For the day breaketh.**—In regard to this, and to the circumstance that Jacob remained alone, Knobel remarks, "that the acts of God are not spectacles for the eyes of impious mortals (see ch. xix. 17; xxii. 13; Exod. xii. 29)." There is, however, a broad distinction between the heathen and theocratic interpretation of this event. There is no reference here to any fear or dread of the day-light on the part of spirits. —**The hollow of his thigh.**—Lit., the socket of the hip. It is not said that he struck it a blow (Knobel); the finger of God (for it is God who is spoken of) needs but to touch its object, and the full result is secured.—**And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint.**—This is explained more fully in the thirty-fourth verse. The sinews of his thigh (*nervus ischiadicus*) were paralyzed through the extreme tension and distortion. But this bodily paralysis does not paralyze the persevering Jacob.—

I will not let thee go.—Now the blessing which he obtained from his father by cunning and deceit must be sought with tears from this mysterious divine man. And then he blesses him when he gives him the name Israel, i. e., the God-wrestler or fighter (from שרה and אל). [The captain and prince of God, from *sarah, to marshal in battle, to lead, command, to fight,* and hast prevailed, שרית, a prince. WORDSWORTH, p. 138.—A. G.] Instead of a supplanter, he has now become the holy wrestler with God, hence his name is no longer Jacob, but Israel. There is no trace in his after-history of the application of his wisdom to mere selfish and cunning purposes. But the new name confirms to him in a word the theocratic promise, as the name Abraham confirmed it to Abram. For the connection of this passage with ch. xxxviii. 10, see the Exegetical note upon that passage.—**And hast prevailed.**—Has he overcome in his wrestling with God, he need have no further fears as to his meeting with Esau.— **Wherefore is it, that thou dost ask after my name?**—The asking after his name in this particular way, not the general inquiry, is the point which occasions this answer. The believer is not to learn all the names of the Lord in this theoretic manner, but through the experience of faith; thus even the name Immanuel. Indeed, he had already learned his name substantially. — **Thou hast wrestled with God and men.**—It does not rest upon "the view which the Jews have when they regard the name Jehovah as ἄρρητον," as Knobel asserts.— **And he blessed him.**—The blessing contained already in the name Israel, is now definitely completed. —**Peniel,** or Penuel with the ו conj., *face of God.* The locality of this place has not been definitely fixed (V. RAUMER, p. 255), but if it could be identified it would be idle to look for it upon the north of the Jabbok. Knobel refers for an analogy to the Phœnician promontory Θεοῦ πρόσωπον. [Keil thinks Peniel was upon the north of the Jabbok though he does not regard it as certain. Kiepert locates it on the Jabbok. It was certainly east of Succoth (see Judg. viii. 8, 9), and was most probably on the north of the Jabbok.—A. G.]—**Face to face.**—With his face he had seen the face of God (Exod. xxxiii.; Deut. xxxiv. 10). Exod. xxxiii. 20 is not in contradiction to this, since that passage speaks of the seeing of God beyond and above the form of his revelation in its legal development.—**And my life is preserved.**—Luther's translation *and my soul is healed, saved,* is equally beautiful and correct. For it is impossible that the idea here is that of the later popular notion: he rejoices that he had seen the face of God and did not die.—**The sun rose upon him.** —The sun not only rose, but rose especially upon him; and with a joyful mind he begins with the sunrise his journey to meet Esau.—**And he halted upon his thigh.**—He appears not to have noticed this before. In the effort of the wrestling it had escaped him, just as the wounded soldier oftentimes first becomes aware that he is wounded by the blood and gash, long after the wound was received.— **Therefore the children of Israel eat not.**— "The author explains the custom of the Israelites, in not eating of the sinew of the thigh, by a reference to this touch of the hip of their ancestor by God. Through this divine touch, this sinew, like the blood (ch. ix. 4) was consecrated and sanctified to God. This custom is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament; the Talmudists, however (Tract.

Cholin, Mischna, 7), regard it as a law, whose transgression was to be punished with several stripes." Knobel. Delitzsch adds: "This exemption exists still, but since the ancients did not distinguish clearly in נִיד (גיד הנשה, the large, strong cord of the sinew of the thigh), between muscle, vein, and nerve, the sinew is now generally understood, i. e., the interior cord and nerve of the so-called hind-quarter, including the exterior also, and the ramifications of both."

6. *Esau's approach, the new arrangement of the train, and the greeting* (ch. xxxiii. 1-11).—**And Jacob lifted up his eyes.**—In contrast to his previous inward contemplation, and in confident expectation.—**And he divided the children.**—We read no more of the two bands or trains. He now separates his family into three divisions. He himself, as the head of the family, as its protector and representative, takes the lead; then follow the handmaids with their children; then Leah with hers; and at last, Rachel with Joseph This inverted order, by which the most loved came last, is not merely chosen from a careful and wise prudence, but at the same time the free expression of the place which they occupied in his affections.—**To the ground seven times.**—Not that he cast himself seven times to the ground, which would have been expressed by אפים ארצה, but he bowed himself seven times with the low inclination of the head [the low oriental bow, in which one bends the head nearly to the ground without touching it. Keil.—A. G.]. But even this courtesy far excels the usual degree in oriental greetings, and finds its explanation in the number seven. The bowing itself expresses the recognition of an external princely prerogative, from which Esau believed that he had robbed him; the seven-fold utterance of this recognition stamps it with the mimic (Ger., *mimische*) seal of the certainty which belongs to the covenant. Thus Jacob atones for his offence against Esau. The manifestation of this courtesy is at the same time, however, a barrier which in the most favorable issue protects him, before mingling with the spirit and temper of the Edomitic army.—**And Esau ran to meet him.**—He is overcome; his anger and threats are forgotten; the brother's heart speaks. Jacob's heart, too, now released from fear, is filled with like affection, and in their common weeping these gray-headed men are twins once more. "The unusual pointing of וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ probably indicates a doubt as to the sincerity of this kiss. But the doubt is groundless. The Scriptures never authorize us to regard Esau as inhuman. He is susceptible of noble desires and feelings. The grace of God which ruled in his paternal home has not left him without its influence." Delitzsch. The assertion of Knobel, "that the author of ch. xxvii. 1 ff. and xxxii. 8 ff. could not thus write if he wrote *proprio marte*," is critically on the same level with the remark of Tuch upon Jacob's prayer, ch. xxxii. 9—"it is unseemly in the narrator that he allows Jacob to remind God of his promises." The old Jewish exegesis has indeed outbid this modern zeal in effacing this great and beautiful moral feature in the narrative. "The Breschith Rabba and Kimchi inform us that some in the earlier time held that וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ meant here *that he bit him*. The Targum of Jonath. says that Jacob's weeping sprung from a pain in his neck, and Esau's from a toothache." Knobel.—**The children which God.**—The name Elohim, out of regard to Esau's point of view [and, as Delitzsch and Keil suggest, in

order not to remind Esau of the blessing of Jehovah, of which he was now deprived.—A. G.]—**Joseph and Rachel.**—It is a fine trait in the picture that the order is here reversed, so that Joseph comes before his mother. The six-year-old lad seems to break through all the cumbrous ceremonial, and to rush confidently into the arms of his uncle.—**By all this drove** (camp or train).—Knobel thinks that he here discovers a third explanation of the name Mahanaim, and finds in the answer of Jacob, these are to find grace, etc., an offensive fawning, or cringing humility. But in fact, it is not a mere present which is here in question, but a voluntary atonement—an indirect confession that he needed forgiveness. We find this same thought also in Esau's refusal.—**I have enough.**—Esau had a two-fold reason for his refusal, for he doubtless possessed a large share of the paternal estate, while Jacob had earned all that he had by the labor of his hands. It is nevertheless a noble strife, when Esau says, keep that thou hast, *I have enough*, and Jacob overcomes him, take, **I pray thee, my blessing,** *I have enough of all*, or *briefly all*.—**For therefore I have seen.** —This cannot mean, I have gained the friendly aspect of thy face by my present, but therefore, for this purpose, is it. As things now stand, the present is an offering of gratitude.—**As though I had seen the face of God.**—The words sound like flattery, but they bear a good sense, since in the friendly face of his brother he sees again in full manifestation the friendliness of God watching over his life's path (Job xxxiii. 26; Ps. xi. 7). [He refers either to his wrestling with the angel, in which he had "learned that his real enemy was God and not Esau, or in the fact that the friendly face of his brother was the pledge to him that God was reconciled. "In the surprising, unexpected change in his brother's disposition, he recognizes the work of God, and in his brother's friendliness, the reflection of the divine." Delitzsch.—A. G.] The words, *take, I pray thee, my blessing*, are just as select and forcible. It is as if, in allusion to the blessing he had taken away, he would say, in so far as that blessing embraced present and earthly things, and is of value to you, I give it back. Knobel explains the choice of the expression from the benedictions which accompanied the present. "The presents to the clergy in the middle ages were called benedictions." But the idea of homage lies nearer here. In the reception of his present he has the assurance that Esau is completely reconciled to him. The friendliness in Esau's countenance is a confirmation to him of the *friendliness* of the divine countenance, a seal of the grace of God, which he saw in his face at Peniel.

7. *Esau's offer and return* (vers. 12-16).—**I will go before thee.**—The kindness of Esau assumes a confidential and officious character. He will take the lead in the way, go before as the protector of his caravan. But that could have happened only at the expense of Jacob's freedom. Besides this, the caravan, with tender children, and sucklings among the cattle, could not keep pace with a train of Bedouin. Jacob urges this strenuously, in order to effect a separation. It is no pretence on his part, but it is the only reason he ventures to offer to the powerful Esau, whose superficial nature unfitted him to appreciate the other reasons. He reveals to him also, in a striking way, his purpose to come to him at Seir. Is this the new Israel or the old Jacob who speaks? The words are ambiguous, even if he actually visited him in after years at Seir, as some have urged as an

26 they wrestled. The man said, 'Let me go, for day is
breaking', but Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless

27 you bless me.' He said to Jacob, 'What is your name?',

28 and he answered, 'Jacob.' The man said, 'Your name shall
no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[a] because you strove with

29 God and with men, and prevailed.' Jacob said, 'Tell me,
I pray, your name.' He replied, 'Why do you ask my

30 name?', but he gave him his blessing there. Jacob called
the place Peniel,[b] 'because', he said, 'I have seen God face

31 to face and my life is spared.' The sun rose as Jacob passed

32 through Penuel, limping because of his hip. This is why
the Israelites to this day do not eat the sinew of the nerve
that runs in the hollow of the thigh; for the man had
struck Jacob on that nerve in the hollow of the thigh.

∗ There is no more strange or perplexing narrative than
this in the whole of the Old Testament. The boldness of the
language and the symbolism in the story is startling. It is not
recounted as a dream or vision, but as an incident which
happened one night. Jacob wrestled with an unidentified
'man' who turned out to be God, wrestled and lived to tell
the tale. Gathered into the story are so many curious elements
that we can only assume that here is a story which has taken
many centuries to reach its present form, and which has
assimilated material, some of it very primitive, which goes
back long before the time of Jacob. It is like an old house
which has had additions built on to it, and has been restored
and renovated more than once during the passing years.
Within the present story we may find:

(i) an explanation of the name given to the ford of Jabbok
(see map p. xiv). This links the name Jabbok with the
Hebrew verb translated 'wrestled' in verses 24–5, a verb

[a] *That is* God strove.   [b] *That is* Face of God (*elsewhere* Penuel).

found only here in the Old Testament. This is 'Wrestling'
ford, for here a man wrestled with Jacob;

(ii) an unidentified man who disputes Jacob's crossing of
the river. This may have its roots in stories, widespread in
many cultures, of the river spirit who has to be placated or
defeated before he will allow the traveller to cross. The
unidentified man may originally have been the river spirit of
the Jabbok;

(iii) the belief that spirits and ghosts who haunt the night
are doomed to disappear before daybreak. 'Let me go', says
the man, 'for day is breaking' (verse 26). Thus the ghost of
Hamlet's father 'faded on the crowing of the cock' (*Hamlet*,
I. i. 157);

(iv) an explanation of the name Israel (verse 28), and of the
occasion on which Jacob's name was changed to Israel
(35: 10 attributes this name change to another occasion and
to a different place);

(v) an explanation as to why a certain place or sanctuary
was called Penuel (verse 30). It is even possible that worship
at Penuel involved some form of limping ritual dance, and
that this was traced back to Jacob passing through Penuel,
limping;

(vi) an explanation of the origin of a food taboo, the
Israelite refusal to eat 'the sinew of the nerve that runs in the
hollow of the thigh' (verse 32), a food taboo not otherwise
mentioned in the laws in the Old Testament. It may go back
to the association of the thigh with procreation.

Once we have looked at all these elements, however, they
hardly tell us what the incident as a whole means in its
present context. The J source is not interested in collecting
and preserving primitive or popular religious ideas; it has
a serious theological purpose, not least in this passage. We can
begin by asking, why does this passage come between the
description of Jacob's preparations to meet Esau and the
account of the meeting in chapter 33? We left Jacob anticipat-
ing his meeting with Esau with anxious fear. He prays to

God, 'Save me' (verse 11). His prayer is answered in the struggle, in the darkness of the eerie gorge of Jabbok, with someone who turns out to be God. Jacob's greatest need is not how to come to terms with Esau, but how to come to terms with God. God was not there merely to answer a selfish cry. This was to be a costly experience, the cost symbolized by the dislocating of Jacob's hip. Yet he persevered, struggled, refused to let his unknown assailant go, until he finds that he has seen God face to face. The history of the people of Israel was often to be the tale of just such an encounter with God; a costly, turbulent struggle in the darkness of tragedy, exile and persecution, but an authentic experience in which they came face to face with God. There is a further point. The change of name from Jacob to Israel is of central importance to the story. Out of the struggle comes a new Jacob, symbolized by the new name; no longer the deceiver or the twister (27: 36), but now Israel, one who has striven with God (see verse 28). It is this new Jacob, new not only in name but in character – the name being the indicator of character and destiny (see the note on 17: 4–5) – who now goes to meet Esau.

22. *his two wives, his two slave-girls, and his eleven sons:* curiously no mention of his one daughter Dinah who features prominently in the following chapter. *Jabbok:* a river now known as the Nahr ez Zerka. It rises in the Jordanian uplands and cuts a deep gorge as it flows down to enter the river Jordan some 40 miles (64 km) south of the Sea of Galilee.

24. *a man wrestled with him:* for this mysterious man who turns out to be God or a divine being, compare the story of the three men who appeared before Abraham's tent (18: 1) and are later identified as angels or divine messengers (19: 1). The prophet Hosea, who seems to have known this story in a slightly different form, talks of the man as an angel.

'Even in the womb Jacob overreached his brother,
and in manhood he strove with God.

The divine angel stood firm and held his own;
Jacob wept and begged favour for himself'

(Hos. 12: 3–4).

till daybreak: this is preferable to the alternative rendering 'at daybreak' (see the N.E.B. footnote), since, after the wrestling has gone on for some time, the man asks to depart 'for day is breaking' (verse 26).

26. *I will not let you go unless you bless me:* Jacob wishes to possess the vitality and the energy so evidently displayed by his assailant. The theme of blessing here echoes the story told in chapter 27 (and its parallel in 28: 2–4). There Jacob obtained his father's blessing by deceit; here he obtains God's blessing in a costly struggle.

28. *Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel:* linguistically the name Israel may mean either 'God strove' (see the N.E.B. footnote) or 'May God strive'. Here it is popularly explained in a different way, with God as the object, not the subject, of the verb strive. It is thus said to reflect Jacob's experience, *you strove with God and with men* or 'you strove with beings divine and human'. *with men:* does this refer to Jacob's successful outwitting of Esau and Laban, or is there an echo here of an old Hebrew folk legend about the exploits of a great hero like the Greek Hercules? (cp. the story of the 'huge stone' in 29: 1–10).

29. Jacob's request to know his adversary's *name* springs from the belief that to know the name of a deity is to possess the secret of his character and therefore to have access to the power which the deity possesses (cp. Exod. 3: 13–14). Here God does not reveal his name (cp. Judg. 13: 18); he remains mysterious.

30. The name Peniel, a linguistic variant of the more usual Penuel (verse 31; Judg. 8: 8–9, 17), is taken to mean 'Face of God' (see the N.E.B. footnote), and to reflect Jacob's experience of seeing God *face to face*. Of Moses alone, elsewhere in the Old Testament, is it claimed that the LORD spoke to him . . .

[handwritten at top right:] CAMBRIDGE BIB. com "GEN" ROBERT DAVIDSON

[handwritten at bottom:] or knew him face to face (Ex 33:11, Dt 34:10) otherwise it was believed that to see God was a fatal experience. Thus the exceptional nature of what happened is underlined in the words "and ~~he~~ ~~appear~~ my life was spared."

THE TYNDALE BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY LECTURE 1974*

THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PATRIARCHS

By M. J. SELMAN

The name of Nuzi has figured prominently in the study of the biblical patriarchs over the last four decades. No serious investigation of Genesis 12-50 can now afford to ignore information found in the cuneiform tablets from this East Tigris site (now Yorghan Tepe) of the mid-second millennium *BC*, for their impact on early biblical history has been considerable.[1] Examples of the important contribution thought to be provided by these texts can be seen in E. A. Speiser's claim that some patriarchal customs "cannot otherwise be explained either from the local background or from any but Hurrian sources",[2] and in J. Bright's conclusion that "the patriarchal customary law was at home specifically among the Hurrian population of approximately the same area at approximately the same time".[3] Similar views are to be found in the large majority of books and articles concerned with the patriarchs.[4]

The benefits of this supposed special relationship with Nuzi can be seen in at least three directions. In the first place, several enigmatic incidents in the patriarchal narratives are now explained on the basis of similar practices at Nuzi. Examples include the inheritance agreement between Abraham and Eliezer (Gn. 15), Jacob's marriages (Gn. 29-31), and Rachel's theft of her father's household gods (Gn. 31). In some cases, the new interpretation has differed radically from anything previously offered, so that C. H. Gordon was able to say the Jacob-Laban narratives, for instance, that they have taken on "an entirely new meaning in the light of the Nuzi documents".[5]

Following on from these comparisons, the Nuzi material has been employed along with other extrabiblical evidence, in support of a date in the second millennium *BC* for the patriarchal period. There is, however, less unanimity than might be expected concerning the value of the Nuzi evidence on this matter. Many scholars prefer to see the patriarchs in the context of the first half of the second millennium *BC*,[6] even though the Nuzi texts were written in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries *BC*. In the light of this later date of the Nuzi tablets, a minority view has been taken by Gordon, who suggested that the background of the patriarchal narratives belongs to the fourteenth century *BC*, on the basis of links with Ugarit and El-Amarna as well as Nuzi.[7] Whichever part of the second millennium is accepted, however, it is generally held that those patriarchal customs to which parallels have been found at Nuzi were quite distinct from those practised in Isreal in the first millennium *BC*. These particular patriarchal customs therefore, and by implication probably also

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[1] A few tablets generally described as Nuzian were in fact found at ancient Arrapha (modern Kirkuk), including the well-known text Gadd 51 (see below pp 123ff), published in C. J. Gadd, *RA* 23 (1926) 51-52. Texts of a similar nature have also been discovered in recent years at Kurruhanni (modern Tell al-Fikhar), about 35 kilometres south-west of Nuzi, − − see F. el-Wailly *Sumer* 23 (1967) pp. e-f; Y. Mahmoud *Sumer* 26 (1970) 112; K. Deller and A. Fadhil *Mesopotamia* 7 (1972) 193-213.

[2] E. A. Speiser, in J. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg (ed.) *Oriental and biblical studies: collected writings of E. A. Speiser* Philadelphia (1967) 264.

[3] J. Bright *History of Israel* rev. ed., London (1972), 86.

[4] Eg., C. H. Gordon *BA* 3 (1940) 1-12; *idem BASOR* 66 (1937) 25-27; *idem RB* 44 (1935), 34-41; *idem Introduction to Old Testament times*, Ventnor (N.J.

(1953) ch. 8; J. N. Schofield *ExpT* 66 (1954/5) 315-318; M. Burrows *JAOS* 57 (1937) 259-276; R. T. O'Callaghan *CBQ* 6 (1944) 391-405; H. H. Rowley *The Servant of the Lord*[2] Oxford (1965) 312-317; R. Martin-Achard *Actualité d'Abraham* Neuchatel (1969); W. F. Albright *The biblical period from Abraham to Ezra* rev. ed., New York (1963) 1-8; *idem Yahweh and the gods of Canaan* London (1968) 47, 58, 87-88; E. A. Speiser *Genesis* (Anchor Bible) New York (1964); *idem* in A. Altmann (ed.) *Biblical and other studies* Cambridge, Mass. (1963) 15-28; *idem JBL* 74, (1955) 252-256; S. Paul, art. Nuzi, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 12 (1971) 1287-1291; H. A. Hoffner in D. J. Wiseman (ed.), *Peoples of Old Testament times* Oxford (1973) 221-229.

[5] C. H. Gordon *BASOR* 66 (1937) 25.

[6] Eg., G. E. Wright *Biblical archaeology* London (1960) 21-22; J. Bright *op. cit.*, 78ff; K. A. Kitchen *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* London (1966) 47ff; W. F. Albright *From the Stone Age to Christianity*[2] New York (1957) 236.

[7] C. H. Gordon *JNES* 13 (1954) 56-59; *idem Introduction to Old Testament times* 102ff; *idem Biblical and other studies* 5-6.

the patriarchs themselves, must derive from a time when such practices were actually in use in the ancient Near East.

The third area affected by this whole discussion is perhaps the most important, namely the historical value of the patriarchal narratives. This matter is of course closely related to the question of date, for if the claimed parallels are genuine, then considerable weight must be attached to the view that the relevant sections of Genesis could not have arisen within certain groups in first millennium Israel, but originated at a period in the second millennium when these customs were practised. This conclusion in its turn implies that the patriarchal narratives as a whole may have a much greater reliability historically than was thought to be the case before the Nuzi texts were widely known.[8]

Until very recently, few dissenting voices have been raised against the views outlined above. Objection have generally been restricted to individual passages in the patriarchal narratives, rather than the nature of the relationship between Nuzi and the patriarchs,[9] although more fundamental questions have been asked by the recent contributions of T. L. Thompson and J. van Seters.[10]

In fact, there are a number of difficulties with the prevailing view. To begin with, despite the publication of approximately 4000 cuneiform tablets from Nuzi, no more than a dozen are quoted with any regularity as being relevant to the background of the patriarchal narratives.[11] In practice, the situation is even more remarkable in that very few scholars mention more than

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[8] See eg., J. Bright, *op. cit.*, 78ff; E. A. Speiser *Biblical and other studies*, 15-28; W. F. Albright *The biblical period* 5; *idem Yahweh and the gods* 47; H. H. Rowley *The Servant of the Lord* 315.

[9] M. Greenberg "Another look at Rachel's theft of the *teraphim*", *JBL* 81 (1962) 239-248; J. van Seters "The problem of childlessness in Near Eastern law and the patriarchs of Israel", *JBL* 87 (1968) 401-408; *idem* "Jacob's marriages and ancient Near Eastern customs", *HTR* 62 (1969) 377-395; C. J. Mullo Weir "The alleged Hurrian wife-sister motif in Genesis", *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 22 (1967/8) 14-25.

[10] T. L. Thompson *The historicity of the patriarchal narratives* (*BZAW* 133) New York and Berlin (1974); J. van Seters *Abraham in history and tradition*, Cambridge (Mass.) (1975). The latter was published after the delivery of this lecture, and therefore has not been taken into account here.

[11] Nearly all the known texts from Nuzi and Arrapha have now been published. A complete list is available in M. Dietrich, etc. (ed.), *Nuzi-Bibliographie* (*AOATS* 11), Kevelaer (1972). See also G. Wilhelm *Untersuchungen zum Hurro-Akkadischen von Nuzi* (*AOAT* 9) Kevelaer (1970) 1-3; B. L. Eichler *Indenture at Nuzi*, Yale (1973) 5-6.

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four or five Nuzi texts.[12] Measured against even the 300 Nuzi tablets relating to family law,[13] these four or five can hardly be regarded as representative. Allowance must be made, it is true, for the fact that many of these texts have been published only as cuneiform copies, and are therefore inaccessible to many Old Testament scholars. Nevertheless, it is a fair assessment to say that the Nuzi texts selected for comparison with the patriarchal narratives have almost always been treated in isolation, while other tablets on the same subject, whether from Nuzi or elsewhere, have been largely ignored.[14] This haphazard approach has actually prohibited rather than promoted any real comparison, which can only be brought about by a much more comprehensive treatment of the Nuzi material.

At the same time, one must recognize the severe limitations of those passages in Genesis 12-50 which describe particular customs. Details are often tantalisingly brief, sometimes permitting more than one interpretation, and the emotions and reactions of the participants are frequently passed over, so that it is rarely possible to obtain any overall picture. In view of these factors, it is especially important to make sure that any substantial reinterpretation of an Old Testament passage on the basis of extrabiblical evidence still has a sound basis in its biblical context.

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[12] Texts which are frequently mentioned include E. Chiera *Harvard Semitic Series* 5 (1929) No. 67 (abbreviated as *HSS* 5 67), transliterated and translated by E. A. Speiser *AASOR* 10 (1928/9 pub. 1930) No. 2; *HSS* 5 69 (*AASOR* 10, No. 27); *HSS* 5 80 (*AASOR* 10, No. 26); E. A. Speiser *AASOR* 16 (1936), No. 56 (copy never published); R. H. Pfeiffer *HSS* 9 (1932), No. 34; and C. J. Gadd *RA* 23 (1926), No. 51 (abbreviated as Gadd 51).

[13] See in particular, E. A. Speiser "New Kirkuk documents relating to family laws", *AASOR* 10 (1928/9 [pub.] 1930) 1-73; E. R. Lacheman, *Family law documents* (*HSS* 19) Harvard (1962) copies only. Some of the relevant texts are also given in transliteration and translation in a number of American doctoral dissertations of variable quality, and are available on microfilm. See for example, J. M. Breneman *Nuzi marriage tablets*, Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis Univ. (1971); S. C. Stohlman *Real adoption at Nuzi*, Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Pennsylvania (1972); J. S. Paradise *Nuzi inheritance practices*, Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Pennsylvania (1972).

[14] Thompson has certainly recognised this problem, but since he has confined himself to transliterated texts almost entirely, he has not realised the full extent of the material available from Nuzi. For instance, in his treatment of Gn. 15:1ff. Thompson mentions only eleven real adoption contracts, which is admittedly an advance on the maximum of six texts usually considered (*HSS* 5 7; 60; 67; *HSS* 9 22; Gadd 51; and E. Chiera *Joint Expedition at Nuzi* I (1927), No. 59-abbreviated as *JEN* 59), but this is far short of the nearly fifty Nuzi texts on this subject.

A rather different aspect of the problem concerns the social context of the Nuzi texts themselves. It is no longer possible to describe Nuzi customs as 'Hurrian',[15] simply on the basis that they show some divergence from better known Mesopotamian practices, and because there was considerable Hurrian influence at Nuzi. There is an increasing awareness that the similarities between Nuzi and other Mesopotamian text groups is in fact greater than was formerly supposed.[16] The consequences of this for the interpretation of Genesis 12-50 is not insignificant. If an individual patriarchal custom can be definitely paralleled in Nuzi, unless that custom can be clearly shown to be Hurrian in origin, one must not be surprised to find similar cases in other cuneiform texts. Since some scholars have already suggested the existence of a number of parallel customs between the patriarchal narratives and cuneiform texts from various parts of the ancient Near East,[17] the uniqueness of the relationship with Nuzi should be called seriously into question.

A further difficulty concerns the whole matter of the suitability of the Nuzi texts for the purpose of determining the date of the biblical patriarchs. Quite apart from the point already raised about the variety of dates for which Nuzi support has been enlisted, there is the further consideration that social customs cannot easily be employed for fixing precise dates. By their very nature, customs are often of long duration, and especially in the ancient Near East, certain practices can be traced through many centuries, though details may vary according to time and place.[18] A custom can only be used legitimately as a chronological guide when it can be definitely

[15] Compare, for example, the quotation from Bright on p. 114.
[16] E. Cassin "L'influence babylonienne à Nuzi", *Journal of the economic and social history of the Orient* 5 (1962) 113-138; B. L. Eichler *op. cit.* 48ff; M. J. Selman *BSOAS* 37 (1974) 678.
[17] C. J. Mullo Weir, in D. W. Thomas (ed.) *Archaeology and Old Testament study*, Oxford (1967) 73-86; R. Frankena *OTS* 17 (1972), 53-64; R. de Vaux *RB* 56 (1949) 19ff; T. L. Thompson *Historicity*, 269ff; J. van Seters *JBL* 87 (1968) 401-408; *idem HTR* 62 (1969), 377-395; J. J. Finkelstein *JAOS* 88 (1968) 30-36.
[18] For example, an eldest son maintained a privileged position in Mesopotamia in texts which date from the end of the third millennium B.C. until the end of the Persian period, though there was some variation in the benefits received. See e.g., A. Falkenstein *Sumerische Götterlieder* I, Heidelberg (1959) 12, 39; J. Köhler and A. Ungnad *Hammurabis Gestze* Leipzig (1909-1923) Nos. 65, 778, 782, 800-802; G. R. Driver and Sir J. C. Miles *The Assyrian laws* Oxford (1935) B I, 0 3; J. Köhler and A. Ungnad *Assyrische Rechtsurkunden* Leipzig (1913) Nos. 41: 6-8, 158:27, 163:20; J. N. Strassmaier *Inschriften von Darius* Leipzig (1897) No. 379.

confined to a particular period. Any individual Nuzi custom can therefore be employed as a means for dating the patriarchs if it can be demonstrated that either the custom itself or its particular form at Nuzi was characteristic of that period and of no other. In fact, the links between Nuzi and Mesopotamian customs of various periods make this possibility unlikely.

The confident conclusions of Speiser, Gordon, and others that a special relationship existed between the people of Nuzi and the patriarchs are therefore not so soundly supported as is generally supposed. Rather, it is now proposed as a result of detailed investigation of the family law documents of Nuzi and the relevant material in Genesis 12-50, that the claimed parallels fall into two main groups:

(a) Those customs where the suggested comparisons must be regarded as invalid, and

(b) Those customs for which parallels can be cited from various parts of the ancient Near East.

In addition, there remains a small group of customs and phrases which have so far appeared only in Genesis 12-50 and the Nuzi documents. Most of these instances, however, are concerned with minor matters, and in each case some degree of uncertainty exists. No clear instance exists of a custom which was restricted to the Nuzi texts and the patriarchal narratives. In the remainder of this lecture, examples to support these conclusions will be examined.

A. Invalid parallels

(i) Wife-sister marriage

The existence of a wife-sister type of marriage in the ancient world was first proposed in 1963 in a remarkable article by E. A. Speiser.[19] He thought that in certain cases a woman could enjoy the special status of both wife and sister to the same man, her position as 'sister' being bestowed by adoption 'into sistership' *(ana aḫatūti)*, in addition to an existing marriage relationship. According to Speiser, this form of marriage was characteristic of upper Hurrian classes. The evidence for it is somewhat limited, however, being confined to

[19] E. A. Speiser "The wife-sister motif in the patriarchal narratives", in A. Altmann (ed.) *Biblical and other studies* Cambridge, Mass. (1963) 15-28.

three Nuzi tablets relating to a single family and a theory of
P. Koschaker's concerning a marriage between a daughter of
Suppiluliumas and one of the Hittite king's Hurrian vassals.[20]
Speiser also claimed to find traces of this custom in three
enigmatic incidents in the patriarchal narratives where Abra-
ham and Isaac apparently pretended that Sarah and Rebekah
were their sisters.[21] In Speiser's view, in the original form of
the tradition, the patriarchs were actually drawing attention
to Sarah and Rebekah's privileged status of 'wife-sister'.

A large number of difficulties arise from this hypothesis. A
major obstacle is that the marriage practices in the three Nuzi
texts and the Hittite vassal treaty still remain problematical.
According to the Nuzi marriage contract *HSS* 5 80:1-23, a
certain Hurazzi took to wife one Beltakkadummi, whereas in
HSS 5 69, he adopted the same woman as his sister. The
third tablet, *HSS* 5 25, is a receipt for a sum of forty silver
shekels, apparently the price of the sistership adoption in *HSS*
5 69, though it could equally well be connected with the
marriage arrangements. No attempt is made in any of the three
tablets to explain their relationship to each other, whether
sociologically or chronologically. Whatever the real explanation
of this situation, there is certainly no mention of any special
status incorporating privileges for the wife or adopted sister.
Nor is there any hint of such a status in any other Nuzi text,
or even that the families involved in the three texts were of a
higher or richer social class. One possible solution is that
Hurazzi adopted Beltakkadummi in order to marry her him-
self, a situation almost identical to one envisaged in a daughter-
ship adoption text (*JEN* 432). This solution would at least ex-
plain why the receipt (*HSS* 5 25) seems to refer to both con-
tracts, since only one payment would be required in such
circumstances, the adopter and husband being the same per-
son. It also has the advantage that it involves known practices,
and does not assume the existence of an otherwise unparallel-
ed custom.[22]

As for the treatment of Sarah and Rebekah before the kings
of Egypt and of the Philistines, it is surely unwise to attempt
an explanation on the basis of a situation for which the evidence

[20] *HSS* 5 25; 69; 80; P. Koschaker *ZA*, Neue Folge 7 (1933) 1-13.
[21] Gn. 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:6-11.
[22] For a similar explanation, see E. Cassin *L'Adoption à Nuzi* Paris (1938)
304.

is so slight, and which is not yet fully comprehended. A detailed
rebuttal of Speiser's theory has already been published by
C. J. Mullo Weir,[23] but there are one or two points that might
be appended to Mullo Weir's arguments. Speiser concluded
that 'wife-sister' marriage was indicative of higher social status,
and was possibly an internationally recognised custom.[24] This
is in fact most unlikely, since even on the basis of Suppiliumas'
vassal treaty, Speiser acknowledged that this supposed concept
would have been distasteful to the Hittite king,[25] and there is
no *a priori* reason why the Egyptian or Philistine kings should
have been any more kindly disposed to the practice. Indeed,
in all three biblical passages, it is clear that the patriarchs were
most certainly not welcome once the women's position was
fully made known. The account in Genesis 12 in particular
emphasizes that as soon as the Pharaoh discovered Sarah's true
identity as both Abraham's wife and sister, the patriarchal
couple were expelled from the country.[26] Furthermore, the
statement in Genesis 20:12 that Sarah was Abraham's half-
sister contains no indication that any adoption might have
been involved or that she thereby gained a special status. The
theory of 'wife-sister' marriage thus lacks any real foundation
in either the Nuzi texts or Genesis 12-50.[27]

(ii)   A Sistership adoption

A further development of Speiser's proposals on
patriarchal marriage customs was that he regarded Genesis
24:53-61 as containing most of the elements of a Nuzi sister-
ship adoption contract *(ṭuppi aḫatūti)*.[28] Out of the five main

[23] C. J. Mullo Weir "The alleged Hurrian wife-sister motif in Genesis",
Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society 22 (1967/8) 14-25;
see also T. L. Thompson *Historicity* 234-248.
[24] *Biblical and other studies* 28.
[25] *Ibid.* 22.
[26] Gn. 12:17-20.
[27] A clue to the explanation of Abraham and Isaac's apparent deceptions
seems to lie in their very real fear of death should the true identity of their wives
be discovered (Gn. 12:12; 20:11; 26:7). On all three occasions, it was clearly
thought preferable to take the risk of putting their wives in a potentially danger-
ous situation rather than face almost certain death themselves as husbands of
women whom the king desired. That the patriarchs anticipated correctly the
behaviour of the Egyptian and Philistine kings is supported by the action of the
Israelite king David in committing murder rather than marry another man's
wife (2 Sa. 11).
[28] E. A. Speiser *Biblical and other studies* 26-27; idem *Genesis* 180-181,
184-185.

clauses occurring in this type of contract, four are identified
by Speiser in the biblical narrative. These are – – (a) the
names of the principals involved (verses 53, 55), (b) the classi-
fication of the transaction as 'sistership', since it was the
girl's brother who took the responsibility (verses 53, 55), (c)
details of the payments (verse 53), and (d) the girl's declara-
tion of agreement (verse 57). Only a penalty clause is lacking,
and the whole is described as a "reasonable facsimile of a
standard Hurrian document".[29]

The most remarkable feature of this reconstruction con-
cerns none of these details, however. It is rather that Speiser
has omitted any reference to the central purpose of Nuzi
sistership adoptions, that the man who adopted a girl as his
'sister' could then give her in marriage, and thereby receive
the marriage payment from her husband. For example, accord-
ing to one sistership adoption contract (*HSS* 19 68), the girl's
real brother who gave her into sistership adoption declared:
"I give my sister A into sistership *(ana aḫatūti)* to T. son of I.,
and T. may give her in marriage as he wishes and will receive
the money from her husband".[30] The expedition of Abraham's
servant in Genesis 24, on the other hand, had a very different
purpose. The servant had no intention of adopting Rebekah
as his sister in order to give her to Isaac as a wife, as a strict
comparison would require, or even of carrying out an adoption
on behalf of either Isaac or Abraham. Nor can the prominent
position of Laban, Rebekah's brother, be used as an argument
for sistership adoption. Even in Nuzi, brothers could give their
sisters into various kinds of adoptive relationships, including
daughtership and daughter-in-lawship, as well as into marriage.[31]

Of the other details in Genesis 24, only the matter of
Rebekah's consent (verse 57) is significant here, though again

[29] *Biblical and other studies* 27.
[30] *HSS* 19 68:2-6. Clauses of this kind occur altogether in seven sistership
adoption contracts from Nuzi (*HSS* 19 67; 68; 69; 143; *JEN* 78; *AASOR* 16 54;
and a tablet from the Yale collection (YBC 12) to be published by E. R.
Lacheman (see J. M. Breneman, *Nuzi marriage tablets* 167)). Only two of these
seven contracts (*HSS* 19 67 and *JEN* 78) are actually entitled 'sistership adoption',
though another Nuzi contract bearing the same title (*HSS* 5 69) omits the clause
relating to marriage. Speiser himself seems to have made use only of *HSS* 5 69
and *JEN* 78 in support of his views, so that his evidence is somewhat distorted.
Cf. also T. L. Thompson *Historicity* 242, 232, 240, on the purpose of sistership
adoption at Nuzi.
[31] *HSS* 5 53; 79; 80; *HSS* 9 24; *HSS* 14 543; *HSS* 19 19; 84; 87; 100; *JEN*
429; 437; 441; 596; *AASOR* 16 23; 55. Incidentally, this factor removes all
support for the presence of fratriarchal elements in Gn 24.

no real comparison is possible. Rebekah's affirmation, "I will
go", can hardly refer to her consenting to marriage with
Isaac, since the marriage had already been agreed by her father
and brother (verses 50-51), a decision in which Rebekah did
not participate. The finality of this agreement between
Abraham's servant and Rebekah's family is indicated by the
subsequent behaviour of Abraham's servant. By making prep-
arations for his return to Canaan, he had obviously concluded
that the purpose of his mission was achieved (verses 52-54).
The only decision required of Rebekah was whether she
would leave for Canaan immediately or delay for a few days.
In any case, even in the Nuzi sistership adoptions, the contract
did not depend on the girl's consent. In those sistership adop-
tions where a statement by the girl occurs, Speiser consistent-
ly translated the relevant phrase *(ina ramānīya)* as "with my
consent".[32] The usual function of *ramānu*, however, is as a
reflexive pronoun, while consent is generally expressed in
Akkadian texts, including those from Nuzi, by a phrase such
as *ina migrāti*.[33] In those cases, therefore, where a man gave
his sister into sistership adoption, her statement is to be under-
stood simply as an acknowledgement of a *fait accompli*.[34]

(iii) The Jacob/Laban narratives

Genesis 29-31 has probably been the most fertile area in
the Old Testament for those who have sought to find com-
parison with the Nuzi documents. Altogether three separate
aspects of Jacob's relationship with Laban are thought to be
paralleled by Nuzi customs, though the proposals are largely
based on a single tablet (Gadd 51). The suggested parallels
include Jacob's adoption by Laban, the classification of
Jacob's marriages within the type known as *errēbu*-marriages,
and the theft of Laban's *terāphîm* as Rachel's attempt to ob-
tain for Jacob either her father's inheritance or leadership in
his family.[35] The incident concerning the *terāphîm* in particu-
lar has been described as "Perhaps the most outstanding ex-
ample of an exclusively Hurrian custom which the patriarchal

[32] Eg., *AASOR* 10 p 61 (*HSS* 5 25:14); *AASOR* 16 p 106 (*AASOR* 16 55:17).
[33] W. von Soden *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* Wiesbaden (1965ff.) 651;
JEN 404:2; 569:2.
[34] *HSS* 5 79; *HSS* 19 68; 69; 82; *JEN* 78.
[35] See for example, the works quoted on pp. 114-5, n. 4.

account records, but which becomes incomprehensible later on in Canaanite surroundings."[36]

Since it was first suggested that there might be a connection between the inheritance of household gods by a real son in preference to an adopted son in Gadd 51 and the theft of Laban's *terāphîm*,[37] further Nuzi texts mentioning household gods have become available. Eleven separate references are now known, and in nine of them, the gods were given as part of an inheritance.[38] In each of these nine texts, heirs also participated in the division who did not receive the gods, which were normally granted to the eldest son, so that possession of such gods clearly did not represent an automatic claim to an inheritance.[39] Since a just claim to an inheritance in any case depended on its proper bequeathal and not simply on possession of the family images,[40] it is hard to see what benefits Jacob could have gained from Laban's estate by his wife's theft. Furthermore, Jacob's desire to put as great a distance as possible between himself and Laban does not betray any great interest on Jacob's part in his father-in-law's property. He made no secret of his frequently expressed desire to return to Canaan.[41] Finally, Jacob was probably not Laban's heir at all, since his wealth was gained from wages paid him by Laban.[42]

The existence of *errēbu*-marriage in the ancient Near East is very doubtful. The only possible occurrences are to be found in the use of the verb *erēbu* ("to enter") in some Assyrian laws referring to a husband 'visiting' his wife who remained in her father's house,[43] and in an emended reference in the Old Babylonian lexical list *ana ittišu*.[44] The abstract form *errēbūtu*

[36] E. A. Speiser *Biblecal and other studies* 24, n. 40.

[37] S. Smith *RA* 23 (1926) p. 127.

[38] Gadd 5; 51; *HSS* 14 108; *HSS* 19 4; 5; 7; *JEN* 89; 216; and an unpublished text mentioned by E. R. Lacheman in H. A. Hoffner (ed.) *Orient and Occident* (*AOAT* 22) Kevelaer (1973), 100.

[39] Cf. eg., J. Bright *History* 78; A. E. Draffkorn *JBL* 76 (1957) 217ff; D. Kidner *Genesis* London (1967) 165; R. de Vaux *RB* 72 (1965) 24-25.

[40] M. Greenberg, "Another look at Rachel's theft of the *teraphim*" *JBL* 81 (1962) 239-248; *cf.* R. Frankena *OTS* 17 (1972) 56; H. Vorländer *Mein Gott* (*AOAT* 23) Kevelaer (1975) 178.

[41] Gn. 30:25ff; 31:3ff; 32:3ff.

[42] Gn. 31:1-9.

[43] G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles *The Assyrian laws* Oxford (1935) §§25-27. 30, 32-33, 36, 38.

[44] B. Landsberger *Die Serie ana ittišu* (*Materialen zum sumerisches Lexikon.* I) Rome (1937) 3:iv:17. For an interpretation of the original reading *nērebūtu,* see J. van Seters *HTR* 62 (1969) 381ff., and especially the note by W. Moran on pp. 382-383.

does not actually occur on any cuneiform tablet. The Assyrian references are restricted to various verbal forms, while *ana ittišu* actually contains the form *nērebūtu,* which is used in connection with the expulsion of a disobedient adoptee. *Ana ittišu* does go on to refer to the reinstatement and marriage of this adoptee to his adopter's daughter,[45] a custom paralleled in Gadd 51 and four other Nuzi texts,[46] but this is nowhere described as an *errēbu* marriage. Though the word *errēbu* does appear in other tablets, it is never used of a type of marriage, or of a special kind of husband.[47]

Neither *ana ittišu* nor the Assyrian laws seem to have any relevance to Genesis 29-31. There is no evidence that Jacob only visited his wives in Laban's house, nor of Laban adopting him in order to marry him to Leah or Rachel. The fact of Jacob's residence in Laban's household[48] could be explained on the basis of either their uncle-nephew or employer-employee relationship.

B.   Wider parallels

(i)   Eliezer's 'adoption'

The position of Abraham's servant Eliezer in Genesis 15 is remarkable, in that he is described as Abraham's heir even though he was not a blood relative of the family.[49] Since in cuneiform texts generally, the only way an outsider could inherit was by adoption into the family, it is often assumed that Abraham had previously adopted Eliezer as son and heir. Benefits accrued to both parties in such circumstances. The adopter gained a son who would provide for him in his old age, and who at his death would ensure proper burial and

[45] B. Landsberger *Ana ittišu* 3:iv:26ff.

[46] In addition to Gadd 51, this practice appears in *HSS* 19 2:33f; 49:18ff; 51; and probably in *HSS* 5 67. though the wife's identity in this last text is not entirely clear. There are also nine further Nuzi texts where the adopter arranged the adoptee's marriage, though not apparently for his own daughter (*HSS* 5 57; *HSS* 19 37; 39; 40; 45; 47; 52; 106; *JEN* 572).

[47] All the references to *errēbu* may be translated in the sense of "usurper, intruder" (see A. L. Oppenheim *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* E 304; W. von Soden *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* 243).

[48] Though compare Gn. 30:30. where Jacob's mention of his own household perhaps indicates that he lived separately from Laban.

[49] Gn. 15:2-3. For the more important proposals for improving the MT of v. 2, see M. Weippert *Bib* 52 (1971) 420-421, n. 1; H. L. Ginsberg *BASOR* 200 (1970) 31-32.

mourning rites, while the adoptee received an inheritance in return.[50] There are some indications that these two essential elements of cuneiform real adoption contracts, the performance of certain duties by the adoptee and the granting of an inheritance by the adopter, can be traced in the narratives concerning Eliezer. Abraham's assertion, "My household slave is my heir",[51] leaves no doubt as to Eliezer's status as heir, but the existence of the second element is not quite so obvious. If Abraham's servant in Genesis 24 is to be identified with Eliezer, then his being given charge of all his master's possessions (Gn. 24:2) implies that he also carried out his responsibilities towards Abraham satisfactorily. Even if this identification is unacceptable, however, it is unlikely in any case that Abraham would have endowed such a privilege on an untrustworthy servant. The lack of any commendatory reference in Genesis 15 to Eliezer's behaviour cannot be used as an argument against his adoption, since the account is a narrative, not a legal contract.

There is nevertheless, one important difficulty in the way of Eliezer's adoption. In the cuneiform adoption tests, an adopted son always retained his inheritance claim even if the adopter subsequently had sons of his own, whereas after the birth of Isaac, Eliezer seems to have enjoyed no such right. Abraham gave "all that he had" to Isaac, and even his concubines' sons received "gifts", but Eliezer is not even mentioned in the account of the division of Abraham's estate (Gn. 25:5-6). Again, the more imprecise character of the narrative form as compared with legal texts means that no final conclusion can be based on the omission of Eliezer's actually taken up his inheritance, but it does keep open the possibility of alternative explanations of Eliezer's status as heir. It may be that this incident simply illustrates the extent of Abraham's *patria potestas*, or perhaps it amounted to an application of the principle enunciated in Proverbs 17:2 — — "a slave who acts

wisely will rule over a son who causes shame, and will share (lit. divide) an inheritance with the brothers". In either case, a theory of adoption is not absolutely necessary.

In spite of these considerations, Eliezer's adoption cannot be ruled out. The adoption of a 'slave' was not impossible since it occurs in two or possibly three Nuzi texts,[52] while there are also six Nuzi tablets where the adopter was himself a slave *(ardu)*.[53] It is clear that some of these 'slaves' were men of wealth and authority, and one was even a royal official,[54] so that the ascription 'slave' could sometimes refer to one's relationship to a higher official and not to social status. The use of the word 'servant/slave' (*cbd*) for Eliezer[55] should probably be interpreted similarly, since Abraham gave considerable responsibility to his most trusted employees.[56]

Furthermore, the real adoption of slaves was not confined to Nuzi. Two examples from the Old Babylonian period and one from the Neo-Babylonian era in Mesopotamia are known of this precise custom.[57] The most significant reference, however, occurs in an Old Babylonian letter, which contains the following statement — — "[T]his [judgment] has never been delivered in Larsa. A father does not adopt his slave if he has sons".[58] The clear implication of the letter is that a man in Larsa, without sons of his own, could adopt his own slave. It is this emphasis on the adoption of one's own slave which is lacking in the Nuzi material, but which shows the close relationship between the Old Babylonian letter and Genesis 15.

(ii) A barren wife's slavegirl

A childless couple in the ancient Near East had several alternative solutions open to them for providing an answer to

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[50] For Nuzi, see for example, E. Cassin *L'Adoption à Nuzi* 275ff; Similar examples can be found in Babylonian and Assyrian texts of various periods, eg., M. Schorr *Urkunden des altbabylonischen Zivil- und Prozessrechts,* Leipzig (1913) Nos. 8-22; B. Landsberger *Die Serie ana ittišu* 3:iii:21ff and 7:iii:23-45; E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus juritischen Inhalts* Leipzig (1927) Nos. 1-4, 6; J. Köhler and A. Ungnad *Assyrische Rechtsurkunden,* Leipzig (1913) No. 41; cf. also A. Falkenstein *Die Neusumerischen Gerichtsurkunden* I, Munich (1956) 110-111.
[51] Gn. 15:3.

[52] *HSS* 9 22; *HSS* 19 16; *JEN* 595. Only the first of these has received any attention from those interested in parallels with the patriarchs.
[53] *HSS* 5 66; *HSS* 19 43; 89; Gadd 9; *JEN* 465; 572.
[54] Paitešup, the adoptee in *HSS* 9 22, who acted as an "administrator" *(šellintänu)* under a high-ranking official (*HSS* 9 29:15; 68:15; cf. 150:rev.1), and a landowner who functioned as both creditor and guarantor (*HSS* 9 19, 20, 30, 68, and SMN 1592 = B. L. Eichler *Indenture,* No. 9).
[55] Gn. 15:3.
[56] Compare Gn. 24:2.
[57] J. Köhler and A. Ungnad *Hammurabis Gesetze* Nos. 22, 23 (cf. M. David *Die Adoption im altbabylonischen Recht* Leipzig (1927), 68, n. 10 and 86, n.28); J. Köhler and F. E. Peiser *Aus dem babylonischen Rechtsleben* IV, Leipzig (1898) 13-14.
[58] M. David in *Symbolae biblicae et mesopotamicae F. M. T. de Liagre Böhl dedicatae* Leiden (1973) 91-92.

their particular problem. They could adopt a son, the husband could marry a second wife or attempt to obtain a son through union with his concubine, or his wife could provide him with a slavegirl. These solutions are found in texts from many periods and places, though the only site where all four are known at present is Nuzi. The last of the four also appears in the patriarchal narratives in connection with the barrenness of Sarah, Rachel, and Leah,[59] and has sometimes been compared with the Nuzi adoption text *HSS* 5 67. This contract contains a clause that if the wife provided by the adopter for his adopted son proved to be barren, the wife was to give a Nullu woman (*i.e.* a slavegirl) to her husband, but the first wife would exercise authority[60] over any children born to the slavegirl. The Nuzi tablet apparently supplies a good parallel to the patriarchal narratives, since the three elements of barrenness as the cause, the wife's initiative in supplying her slavegirl, and the authority of the wife over the children occur in both contexts.[61]

Two important factors need to be borne in mind at this stage. The first is that there are examples of the same practice in cuneiform texts outside Nuzi. The case of the *nadītu*-priestess who was not allowed to have her own children, mentioned in the laws of Hammurapi, provides an illustration which fits exactly into the pattern, even though it is a restricted application of the same principle.[62] According to § 163 of the same law collection, the same provision appears to have applied also to ordinary wives, while another Old Babylonian contract referring to a girl who acted as a slave for the wife and a concubine for the husband may provide a further example.[63] Finally the inclusion of a female slave in a dowery, mentioned in three Old Babylonian marriage contracts and in Genesis 24:59, 61, is probably also related to this practice.

The second note of caution arises out of the fact that *HSS* 5 67 is the sole example of this custom in Nuzi. This particular tablet must be set alongside five Nuzi marriage contracts in which a husband was allowed to marry a second wife if the

[59] Gn. 16:1-4; 30:1-13.

[60] For this aspect, see below, p. 133.

[61] Gn. 16:2; 30:1-4, 9. For the authority exercised by the patriarchs' wives, see below, p. 133.

[62] The laws of Hammurapi, §144.

[63] M. Schorr *op. cit.* No. 77.

first was barren,[64] and four where it is clearly implied that he could raise up offspring through his concubine in similar circumstances.[65]

Taken together, these two factors require us to see their particular patriarchal custom in a wider context. The practice seems to have been rare in Nuzi, and though it was also known in Babylonia in the Old Babylonian period, different solutions to the problem of barrenness were more frequently employed.

A brief word may be included here concerning van Seters' suggestion that the Nimrud tablet ND 2307 of the late 7th century BC is a closer parallel to the patriarchal narratives than *HSS* 5 67.[66] His theory makes use of several details in this Neo-Assyrian marriage contracts but further examination shows that it is not well supported by the facts. The basic difficulty is that the custom described in ND 2307 is essentially different from that mentioned in Genesis and *HSS* 5 67, in that it was not the wife who presented her own slavegirl to the husband in Nimrud, but the husband who took his slavegirl. Though the Neo-Assyrian concept is of course closely related, it lacks the vital ingredient of the wife taking the initiative. In any case, in ND 2307 the slavegirl does not appear to have belonged to the barren wife at all. A further point concerns van Seters' assertion that in the Nimrud tablet, the slavegirl's sons were specifically stated to be the wife's sons also. No such statement occurs in the contract in fact, since the relevant passage is partly damaged and its sense cannot be fully recovered. It is thus clear that the first millennium text has less relevance for the patriarchal narratives than *HSS* 5 67.[66a]

[64] *HSS* 5 80:1-23; *HSS* 19 78; 84; Gadd 12; and an unpublished Nuzi text in the British Museum.

[65] *HSS* 9 24; *HSS* 19 85; *JEN* 435; and the unpublished text mentioned in the previous note.

[66] J. van Seters "The problem of childlessness in Near Eastern law and the patriarchs of Israel" *JBL* 87 (1969) 401-408.

[66a] The Nimrud tablet ND 2307 has recently been collated by Postgate and a new translation published in his *Fifty Neo-Assyrian legal documents,* Warminster (1976) 103-107. Two important changes emerge in Postgate's revised reading in comparison with the original publication (*Iraq* 16 (1954) 37-39, 55), on which my observations above were based: (a) it was the wife who acquired the slavegirl in the event of a barren marriage, and (b) it is fairly clear, though not absolutely so, that the slavegirl's sons were reckoned to the wife. Although ND 2307 therefore clearly describes the same basic custom as the second millennium cuneiform texts and the patriarchal narratives, it does not support van Seters' contention

(iii) A second wife

When Jacob and Laban made a covenant together in the hill country of Gilead, one of the conditions was that Jacob should marry no-one apart from Laban's two daughters.[67] This demand by Laban was considered by Gordon to be directly comparable with a similar clause in the adoption contract Gadd 51, and he used the comparison as an argument in favour of Jacob's adoption.[68] The suggested parallel is indeed a genuine one, but it does not possess quite the significance attached to it by Gordon. In the first place, this restriction was not confined to one Nuzi text. A similar prohibition is found in marriage contracts from many parts of the ancient Near East from the Old Assyrian period onwards, including several references in Nuzi, and was a means of protection for the status of the wife to be.[69] In the context of the patriarchal narratives, however, this restriction does not appear in a marriage contract at all, since Jacob had already been married to Leah for thirteen years and to Rachel for six.[70] Its importance as a parallel is thus somewhat diminished, though it retains some relevance in that as part of a formal agreement between Jacob and Laban, it seems to have retained its legal character among the patriarchs.

(iv) Birth on the knees

The practice of giving birth on someone's knees, mentioned twice in Genesis 12-50,[71] is sometimes thought to provide evidence for adoption among the patriarchs.[72] The custom

that it provides a better parallel to Genesis than *HSS* 5 67. No new parallel to the biblical material is added by the Neo-Assyrian text. In fact, it simply illustrates again the long continuity of ancient Near Eastern customs, and it certainly does not favour a first rather than a second millennium date for this particular section of the patriarchal narratives, as van Seters proposed.

[67] Gn. 31:50.

[68] C. H. Gordon *BASOR* 66 (1937) 25-27.

[69] Eg., J. Lewy *HUCA* 27 (1956) 6-10; D. J. Wiseman *The Alalakh tablets* London (1953) Nos. 91-94; B. Parker *Iraq* 16 (1954), 37-39; J. Köhler and F. E. Peiser *Aus dem babylonischen Rechtsleben* I Leipzig (1890) 7.

[70] Gn. 29:18-23; 31:38, 41.

[71] Gn. 30:3; 50:23. Compare also Gn. 48:12, where Jacob removes his two grandsons/adopted sons from his knees prior to bestowing his blessing.

[72] Largely following the work of Stade, (*ZAW* 6 (1888) 143-156), whose arguments were partly based on parallels from Homeric Greece, Old Germany, and the modern Bedouin.

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does not appear in Nuzi, but it does occur in two Hurrian tales, the Ullikummish myth[73] and the Appush myth. A most interesting passage in the latter text, describing the birth of Appush's son, reads as follows, "The nurse lifted up the boy and set him on Appush' knees. Appush began to amuse the boy and to dandle him. To him he gave the 'sweet' name of Idalush".[74] The concept involved here is not that of adoption. Rather, the ideas associated with the placing of the child on its father's knees are those of giving birth, naming the child, welcome by the family, and fondling by the parents. It is significant that all these associations are found in the Old Testament, including the two references in the patriarchal narratives.[75] In addition, the words of a recurring Neo-Assyrian blessing, "May the king, my lord, lift his grandsons upon his knees",[76] are strongly reminiscent of the reception by Jacob and Joseph of their own grandsons and greatgrandsons on their knees.[77] In view of these parallels, and the lack of any clear reference to adoption in the patriarchal references, it seems better to see this custom as one connected primarily with birth and the welcome of a child into its family by the head of the family.

C. Parallels so far restricted to Genesis and Nuzi

These parallels comprise only a small group, and a complete list of examples follows here. All of them concern points of contact of secondary importance, and it is possible that the very existence of this group should be explained by nothing more than an accident of discovery.

(i) "to eat money" (*'kl ksp*)

One of the accusations brought by Leah and Rachel against their father was that he had "eaten" or "consumed" their money (*wy'kl gm 'kl kspn*).[78] This unusual

[73] H. A. Hoffner *JNES* 27 (1968) 201, n. 27.

[74] Translation by H. A. Hoffner, *loc. cit.* 199; text in A. Walther *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* 24, Berlin (1930) No. 8.

[75] Birth is mentioned in Gn. 30:3 and Jb. 3:11-12, naming of a child in Gn. 30:3, welcome by a senior member of the family in Gn. 48:12 and 50'23, and fondling by a parent in Is. 66:12.

[76] S. Parpola *Letters from Assyrian scholars* (*AOAT* 5/1) Kevelaer (1970) No. 72:r.12-15; 186:16-17; *cf.* 187:2'-3'; R. Harper *Assyrian and babylonian letters* London 1892-1914 *No. 178:r.5.*

[77] Gn. 48:12; 50:23.

[78] Gn. 31:15.

phrase has been interpreted in various ways, including a sugges-
tion by Gordon that it refers to enjoying the 'usufruct' of cer-
tain goods or money, on the basis of a similar phrase in some
Nuzi texts *(kaspa akālu)*. [79] Gordon regarded the *kaspu/*
in all the references as another term for a dowry, supposing
that this was kept in trust by the bride's father in case of
widowhood or divorce, but that he could enjoy any income
from it while it remained in his possession. The main difficulty
of this theory for comparative purposes was that while the
practice was clearly condemned in Genesis, in the Nuzi tab-
lets there was no such criticism. [80]

As far as the patriarchal narratives are concerned, Gordon's
suggestion that the 'money' represented a dowry is probably
correct. The two girls clearly expected to receive a gift from
Laban in connection with their marriage, but he had withheld
it from them unexpectedly. In Nuzi, the phrase occurs five
times, mainly in adoption contracts, [81] an in every case refers
to money which was to be paid by a girl's future husband to
the person now adopting her. In some texts, part of the
money was to be paid to her original guardian as well. For
example, in one sistership adoption text, the adopted girl
states, "A. [the adopting brother] shall receive and 'consume'
(ikkal) twenty silver shekels from my husband, and my
brother E. [now giving her in adoption to A.] shall (also)
'consume' *(ikkal)* twenty silver shekels". [82] A significant
feature of all five texts is that provision is never made for a
dowry. It is possible, therefore, that instead of the adoptive
guardian giving his adoptee a dowry, a sum which was usually
deducted from the groom's payment, in these five cases the
adoptive guardian kept all the money himself. The reprehen-
sible nature of such behaviour would of course receive no
mention in a legal contract. This explanation would account
for the use of the verb *'kl*, which in both Hebrew and
Akkadian means to "eat, consume", that is, take the whole
sum, rather than just enjoy the income. It also means that

the phrase can be interpreted consistently in both Nuzi and
the patriarchal narratives.

(ii) A wife's authority over her slavegirl's children

It is doubtful whether this practice should be included
here, since as already indicated, it belongs to the custom of
a barren wife giving her slavegirl to her husband for the pur-
pose of raising children. [83] The custom as a whole was known
outside Nuzi, [84] but this particular aspect has been found so
far only in *HSS* 5 67, apart from in Genesis 12-50. Presumab-
ly, similar clauses will eventually appear in other texts in the
future. According to *HSS* 5 67, a first wife would exercise
authority *(uwâr)* over any children born from the union of her
husband and her slavegirl. [85] Evidence for the exercise of
authority by the patriarchs' wives over the children born to
their slavegirls is based on two details. The first is that the
patriarchs' wives were responsible for the naming of these
offspring. [86] The second concerns the strange expression which
translated literally means "I shall be built up" *('ibbāneh)* –
Gn. 16:2, 30:3). The use of this idiom suggests that Sarah
and Rachel considered that the children born in this way
would be reckoned to them rather than to their real mothers.

(iii) Oral statements

In a special study of the background of Isaac's blessing
in Genesis 27, Speiser argued that this chapter, together with
three Nuzi texts, [87] showed that both at Nuzi and among
the patriarchal clans, a final oral disposition by the head of a
household had solid legal standing. [88] Furthermore, through
such oral statements, an 'eldest' son could be appointed, who
would thus enjoy the privileges accompanying such status,
as in *HSS* 5 48.

In point of fact, this theory requires considerable modifi-

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[79] C. H. Gordon *RB* 44 (1935) 36. Compare RSV, "he has been using up the money given for us".

[80] M. Burrows *JAOS* 57 (1937) 269; R. T. O'Callaghan *CBQ* 6 (1944) 403; T. L. Thompson *Historicity* 274.

[81] *HSS* 5 11; 26; *HSS* 13 15; Gadd 35; G. Contenau *Textes cunéiformes du Louvre* 9 Paris (1926) No. 7.

[82] *HSS* 5 26:13-16.

[83] See above, pp. 127ff. See also the revised reading of ND 2307 (p. 129, n.66a), which probably gives another reference to a wife's responsibility for her slave-girl's children.

[84] See above, p. 128.

[85] For this reading, see E. A. Speiser *Genesis* 121.

[86] Gn. 30:6-8, 10-13.

[87] *HSS* 5 48; *HSS* 9 34; *AASOR* 16 56.

[88] E. A. Speiser "I know not the day of my death" *JBL* 74 (1955) 252-256.

cation. None of the Nuzi tablets, or Genesis 27 for that mat-
ter, are oral wills, as Speiser suggested, and there is no evid-
ence at Nuzi for arbitrary determination of birthright. Nor
have any of the three Nuzi texts anything to do with paternal
blessings, which is the real subject matter of Genesis 27. *HSS*
5 48 is concerned with oral evidence obtained from the bed-
side of a sick witness in the presence of eight court officials.
The witness was requested by the court to identify his eldest
son, but this was not the occasion of the appointing of his
chief heir. The inheritance of the son mentioned in *HSS 5 48*
had been settled previously, when the man who was now an
invalid had adopted this heir because he was without sons of
his own.[89] The second tablet, *AASOR* 16 56, concerns the
legal validity of an oral statement made by a father about the
arrangements for his youngest son's marriage. The interest of
this text is that as the original oral statement was delivered,
the father grasped his youngest son's hand, an action clearly
regarded as being legally significant. *HSS 9 34*, the third text
quoted by Speiser, contains three statements about the
tenancy of or responsibility for a particular area of land. The
tablet should probably be treated as a written record of the
statements, of the same kind as those introduced by the term
lišānu ("disposition").[90] The preservation of the three state-
ments in this document does not seem to have been left to
oral transmission.

The only real point of contact between these texts and the
patriarchal narratives concerns the use of oral statements in
ancient law. It is noteworthy that in *HSS 5 48* and *AASOR*
16 56 on the one hand, and Genesis 27 and 48 on the other,
certain legal safeguards always accompanied statements of
this kind. A total of four of these actions or rituals, intended
to authenticate the spoken word, are mentioned, though two
of them are closely related. The grasping of the hand in
AASOR 16 56 is reminiscent of the way in which Jacob laid
his hands on Ephraim and Manasseh in pronouncing a blessing
upon them (Gn. 48). Although the two actions are not iden-
tical, the position of one's hands could clearly be an import-
ant consideration when accompanying an oral statement, and
according to the Nuzi text, was worthy of mention in a sub-

sequent lawsuit.[91] A kiss also appears to have had a legal
function on certain occasions among the patriarchal clans.
Both Isaac and Jacob preceded the granting of their final
blessing by kissing the person who was to receive the blessing.
An incidental act of this kind would hardly be mentioned if
it were not regarded as significant.[92] Finally, the presence of
witnesses at the time when the original statement was made
in *HSS 5 48*, provides further evidence that legal validity of
oral arrangements depended on the observance of certain
accepted procedures, and was by no means an arbitrary process.

Conclusion

One important conclusion of our investigation is that no
special relationship exists between the Nuzi tablets and the
patriarchal narratives. If this indicates that the results are
largely negative, then it must be recognised that an approach
of this kind is sometimes a necessary preparation for real
progress. To identify a false trail can be an essential task
before the correct path is to be made clear. Thus, our quest
for an understanding of the social background of Genesis
12-50 must be turned away from a single avenue of investi-
gation, which is now seen to be less profitable than it once
seemed, towards a much wider area altogether. To concentrate
on Nuzi as the key to the original context of the patriarchal
way of life is to overlook the equal if not greater value of
material from a variety of ancient Near Eastern sites. Second-
ly therefore, it is vital to take into account evidence from
Syria, Babylonia, Assyria, and even further afield. It is now
possible to compare related practices in different periods and
places, as for example in the various alternatives to marrying
a second wife when the first proved barren. Individual cus-
toms in Genesis 12-50 do not have to be compared with infor-
mation based on an isolated cuneiform tablet, and it is be-
coming increasingly important to examine each practice in its
fullest possible context.

The word of caution expressed earlier concerning the value
of social customs as a means of dating the patriarchs also
needs to be underlined. None of the customs discussed here

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[89] *HSS* 5 67.
[90] For examples, see E. Cassin *L'Adoption, passim.*

[91] Gn. 27:21 is not significant in this context, since it is concerned with the special
problem of Isaac's almost complete blindness (*cf.* E. A. Speiser *loc. cit.* 254 n. 10).
[92] Gn. 27:6-7; 48-10.

are sufficiently precise chronologically for dating purposes, and this applies equally to attempts to set the patriarchal period against the background of the first millennium as well as the second millennium BC. In the present state of our knowledge, it is perhaps sufficient to draw attention to two matters. At the moment, the large majority of relevant social parallels derive from second millennium sources, though it is important to add that much less is known about comparable customs from the first millennium BC in Mesopotamia and Syria. Secondly, the patriarchal customs discussed in sections B and C were quite at home in Mesopotamian culture of the second millennium, whereas some of them, such as the provision of a slavegirl by a barren wife for her husband, are unknown in Israel and Judah in the first millennium BC. Presumably the traditions in Genesis 12-50 containing references to these customs had a thorough acquaintance with a Mesopotamian way of life, since knowledge of this kind can only be gained through sustained rather than occasional contact. No opportunity for a long term acquaintance of this nature existed in pre-exilic Israel in the first millennium BC, so that the second millennium appears to provide the only adequate alternative. The most likely period would be when the Abrahamic clans moved freely about the Near East, when the consciousness of their Mesopotamian origins was something that belonged to the comparatively recent past, though the chronological limits cannot be fixed by data based on customary law alone.

Finally, the background of the Nuzi texts themselves requires some reinterpretation. It is clear that most of the Nuzi material considered here fits well into a Mesopotamian context, indicating that Nuzi practices cannot be treated automatically as Hurrian. There is of course considerable evidence of Hurrian influence at Nuzi, as in the personal names, technical terms, scribal traditions, and probably in the prevalence of 'sale-adoptions', but the distribution of Hurrian and Mesopotamian elements in the structure of Nuzi society is no superficial task. It appears that, like many outsiders who settled in ancient Mesopotamia, the Hurrians of the Nuzi area adopted Mesopotamian practices to a considerable extent.

FROM THE BRICKFIELDS OF EGYPT

By K. A. KITCHEN

In early Hebrew tradition, one of the most evocative and familiar *topoi* for us moderns — heard in childhood and studied later — is that of the hapless Hebrew slaves toiling in the brickfields of the Egyptian East Delta under the lash of Pharaoh's taskmasters (Ex. 1:11-14; 5:5ff.). Much is made of the date, the route, the historical and theological significance of the oppression and exodus (and rightly so), but little more than a glance is usually spared for details of those toils preceding the exodus that were so painfully etched in the Hebrews' memories. The subject is hardly a burning issue, but is perhaps not unworthy of some modest attention based on first-hand material either quite new or long available but much neglected.

First, I outline textual references to brick-production in pharaonic Egypt; the vast archaeological material lies beyond the needfully limited purview of this paper.[1]

From the Old Kingdom ('Pyramid Age', third millennium *BC*) comes the earliest body of original papyrus documents. These are fragments of the meticulously-compiled accounts from the pyramid-temple of king Neferirkare at Abusir, a little north-west of ancient Memphis.[2] Besides the neatly-ruled tables of daily and monthly duties of priests and temple

[1] Egyptian building modes in general, *cf.* S. Clarke and R. Engelbach, *Ancient Egyptian Masonry: the Building Craft*, London (1930). The basic physical evidence on nature, types and uses of brick in ancient Egypt has been dealt with by A. J. Spencer in his doctoral thesis at Liverpool.

[2] The Abusir papyri, divided among several museums. Introduction, photos and hieroglyphic transcriptions are published in Mme. P. Posener-Kriéger and J.-L. de Cenival, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, 5th Series*, British Museum, London (1968); translation and commentary, forthcoming. These accounts date from the reigns of Isesi to Teti (*c.* 2380-2340 BC), up to a century after the death of Neferirkare.

Religion

By One Hand?

Computers reread Genesis

Jewish tradition holds that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Conservative Christians agree. But 19th century Protestant critics emphasized the Pentateuch's diversity rather than its unity. They deemed it a scissors-and-paste job on materials from different centuries by four anonymous authors: the Jahwist ("J"), Elohist ("E"), Priestly writer ("P") and Deuteronomist ("D"). Though traditionalists rejected it, this J.E.P.D. theory hardened into liberal orthodoxy.

Now the four-author thesis has come under a powerful new attack. The ancient view, it seems, is supported by that most modern deity of omniscience, the computer. Bible Scholar Yehuda Radday of Haifa's Israel Institute of Technology reports that a five-year computer study of *Genesis* shows that it is the work of a single writer and that the J.E.P.D. theory must be "rejected or at least thoroughly revised."

Radday and three aides studied "the only unquestionable data," the words of the Hebrew text, and concentrated on 56 criteria of "language behavior" (such as use of conjunctions and word length) that are outside the conscious control of an author. The key finding: a remarkably high 82% probability that the same person wrote the supposed J and E passages. The P passages were as distinct as the critics have long maintained, but Radday contends that the difference can be explained totally by the formalistic content. Says he: "My love letters to my wife are completely different from my scholarly articles."

None of this proves that the single writer was Moses, but Radday is already hard at work on *Exodus* and will then search *Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*. Radday's challenge will be fiercely resisted by scholars who favor the entrenched J.E.P.D. theory, partly because he deals exclusively with linguistic criteria and ignores stylistic variations. Radday is no right-wing ideologue, however. Earlier he earned wide acclaim when his whirring computers supported the conventional theory that multiple authors produced the books of *Judges, Zechariah* and *Isaiah*. Says Radday: "These scholars can't have it both ways, approving a method when it suits them, and repudiating it when it does not." ∎

Israel's Radday